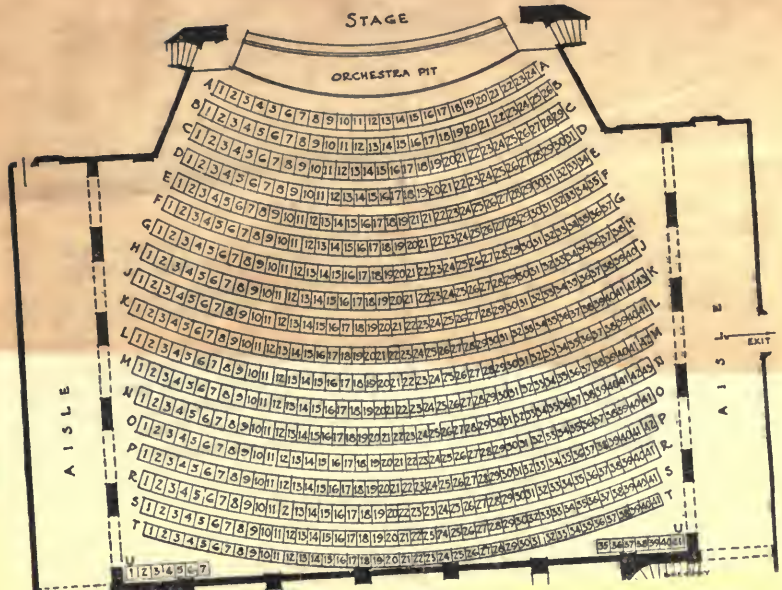
The TRAGEDY *of* NAN

JOHN MASEFIELD


STAGE
ORCHESTRA PIT
AISLE
AISLE
EXIT

There isn't much of either throb or pulse in the Goodman Theater's revival of "The Tragedy of Nan": none indeed, save as the qualities called for by Masefield's loose, lovely, formless, and effective essay in playmaking are provided by Mrs. J. Elliott Jenkins in the part of Nan. Her playing is good: she knows the rôle, what it is about, and where it runs high and runs low; and I fancy that her impersonation would be uncommonly effective if she were part of an ensemble whose other members provided somthing for her to act with, to, for, and against. Masefield put one of the finest love-scenes in all English drama into the second act of this play; but I have as yet encountered no player, man or woman, so gifted that he or she could play it alone. That's the way with *scènes-à-deux*: they *are* designed for two persons!

—•—

It may be that something of feeling, passion, color, and a sense of character and situation will come to the others of the cast with repetition. What they submitted last night was rather disordered and aimless: there was fuss, and there wasn't movement. That they didn't catch the especial dialect of Gloucestershire and the Severn country, with its harsh reflection of the Welsh way with rustic English idiom, was not surprising, nor yet a reason for excess woe: the play, after all, owes none of its drama to the dialect, which represents a literary stunt of Masefield's rather than a high achievement in playwriting.

—•—

"The Tragedy of Nan," in the present plans of the Goodman, is to be continued in the half-week routine of the "professional" wing until April 10, and is to be followed, the 15th, by the deferred revival of Molière's "Don Juan," with which will be acted Shaw's little piece about Napoleon named "The Man of Destiny." Later, it is planned, "A Mid-Summer Night's Dream" will be put on; and it is for this, I guess, Whitford Kane has been engaged: he might be happy as Bottom.

* *

By

JOHN MASEFIELD

ROSAS
GALLIPOLI
RIGHT ROYAL
THE FAITHFUL
SELECTED POEMS
LOST ENDEAVOUR
A MAINSAIL HAUL
REYNARD THE FOX
CAPTAIN MARGARET
THE DAFFODIL FIELDS
THE OLD FRONT LINE
MULTITUDE AND SOLITUDE
THE STORY OF A ROUND-HOUSE AND OTHER POEMS
GOOD FRIDAY AND OTHER POEMS
SALT WATER POEMS AND BALLADS
THE EVERLASTING MERCY AND THE WIDOW IN THE BYE STREET
PHILIP THE KING, AND OTHER POEMS
THE TRAGEDY OF POMPEY THE GREAT
LOLLINGDON DOWNS AND OTHER POEMS
THE LOCKED CHEST AND THE SWEEPS OF NINETY-EIGHT
THE TRAGEDY OF NAN AND OTHER PLAYS

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"The tide. The tide coming up the river."

THE TRAGEDY OF NAN

By

JOHN MASEFIELD

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1921

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To
W. B. YEATS

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AUTHOR'S NOTE

Tragedy at its best is a vision of the heart of life. The heart of life can only be laid bare in the agony and exultation of dreadful acts. The vision of agony, or spiritual contest, pushed beyond the limits of the dying personality, is exalting and cleansing. It is only by such vision that a multitude can be brought to the passionate knowledge of things exulting and eternal.

Commonplace people dislike tragedy, because they dare not suffer and cannot exult. The truth and rapture of man are holy things, not lightly to be scorned. A carelessness of life and beauty marks the glutton, the idler, and the fool in their deathy path across history.

The poetic impulse of the Renaissance is now spent. The poetic drama, the fruit of that impulse, is now dead. Until a new poetic impulse gathers, playwrights trying for beauty must try to create new forms in which beauty and the high things of the soul may pass from the stage to the mind. Our playwrights have all the powers except that power of exultation which comes from a delighted brooding on excessive, terrible things. That power is seldom granted to man; twice or thrice to a race perhaps, not oftener. But it seems to me certain

that every effort, however humble, towards the achieving of that power helps the genius of a race to obtain it, though the obtaining may be fifty years after the strivers are dead.

This country tragedy was written at Greenwich in February, March, and September 1907. Part of it is based upon something which happened (as I am told) in Kent about a century ago. As I am ignorant of Kentish country people I placed the action among a people and in a place well known to me.

JOHN MASEFIELD.

4th April 1911.

PREFATORY NOTE

I began to write this play either at the end of 1906 or the beginning of 1907. I began it upon a fable that had been given to me in conversation, as something that had occurred in Kent about a century ago. A barrister in looking through some papers had found mention of a case in which a man had been hanged for sheep-stealing. After his execution, proof came to hand that he was innocent. Someone, or some institution or department, thought to remedy the matter by giving money to the man's daughter, "but it was then too late of course." That was the story as it was first told to me.

Thinking it over, I decided to write a play upon this fable, partly because I was then feeling acutely the horror of miscarriage of justice, and partly because I saw in the fable an opportunity of writing of every side of a woman's character. As the fable in itself seemed not enough, I invented the further matters of an unhappy love and harsh surroundings. I laid the scene of the play at an imaginary farmhouse in the hamlet of Broad Oak, on the brink of the Severn, near Newnham-on-Severn in Gloucestershire.

The mention of the Tide in the last Act may need a few words of explanation. The Severn is a tidal

river, in which a Bore or Eager forms at high water, owing to the channel being too narrow for the volume of water rushing in. The tide, being constricted or pent in, is heaped up, so that it advances much as I describe it, in a wall of water across the river, two or three feet higher than the level of the stream up which it comes. As it advances, it roars like an express train. The certainty and fatality of its march make it a very noble and very terrible sight.

I have to thank Messrs. Tilley & Son, of Ledbury, in Herefordshire, for taking the photographs with which this volume is illustrated, in the cold and wet of an early wild March morning.

JOHN MASEFIELD.

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THE TRAGEDY OF NAN

THE TRAGEDY OF NAN

PERSONS	PLAYED BY
JENNY PARGETTER	Miss Mary Jerrold
MRS. PARGETTER	Mrs. A. B. Tapping
WILLIAM PARGETTER . . .	Mr. Horace Hodges
NAN HARDWICK . . .	Miss Lillah McCarthy
DICK GURVIL	Mr. A. E. Anson
ARTIE PEARCE	Mr. Percy Gawthorn
GAFFER PEARCE	Mr. H. R. Hignett
TOMMY ARKER	Mr. Allan Wade
ELLEN	Miss Marion Nugent
SUSAN	Miss Bokenham
THE REV. MR. DREW . .	Mr. Edmund Gurney
CAPTAIN DIXON	Mr. H. Athol Forde
THE CONSTABLE	Mr. Christmas Grose

This play was produced by the Pioneers at the New Royalty Theatre, on 24th May, 1908, *under the direction of Mr. H. Granville Barker. At its revival as a matinee at the Haymarket Theatre, in June,* 1908, *the part of the Rev. Mr. Drew was played by Mr. Cecil Brooking.*

THE TRAGEDY OF NAN

ACT I

SCENE:—*A kitchen in the house of a small tenant farmer at Broad Oak, on Severn.* 1810.

[MRS. PARGETTER *and* JENNY *rolling dough and cutting apples.*]

[JENNY *takes flour from cupboard.*]

JENNY. It do seem quiet 'ere, Mother, after service.

MRS. P. P'raps now I'll 'ave some quiet.

JENNY. Only think, Mother, the ladies 'ad cups of tea in bed of a morning.

MRS. P. P'raps now you're come 'ome, I'll 'ave my cup of tea, it's time I'd a little something after all I gone through.

JENNY. Why, Mother?

MRS. P. What with that girl—Mooning round with 'er great eyes.

JENNY. Do 'ee mean Cousin Nan, Mother?

MRS. P. Mind your work. I wish them groceries'd come.

JENNY. Us'll 'ardly 'ave the things ready, Mother. Company be coming at dark.

MRS. P. Things'll 'ave to be ready. 'Old your tongue.

JENNY. 'Oo be coming, Mother, besides Dick Gurvil?

MRS. P. Young Artie Pearce, wold Gaffer Pearce, them girls o' Robertses, and Tommy Arker.

JENNY. Us shall be quite a pearty, shan't us?

MRS. P. It won't be much of a pearty to me, with that Nan in the room. She tokens 'er dad too much.

JENNY. Why, Mother?

MRS. P. Always so prim and well be'aved, thinking 'erself so much better than anyone.

JENNY. Ah!

MRS. P. Always 'elping 'er friends as she calls them.

JENNY. 'Elpin' them, Mother?

MRS. P. Barthin' their brats for 'em. 'Oo knows what dirt they've been playing in? Or mending their linen. Flying in the face of Providence. She might bring us all the fever. [*Going over to get a chair.*] 'Ow many more times am I to tell yer I won't 'ave your things left about? Look 'ere at this chair.

JENNY. What be it, Mother?

MRS. P. Look 'ere at your coat. 'Oo's to get you a new coat when this is wore out? I will 'ave you careful. Every day of my life I'm putting your clothes away. Idle lawkamercy girl—

JENNY. That ben't mine, Mother. That be Cousin Nan's.

MRS. P. It's a wonder you couldn't say so at once. Oh! so it's 'ers, is it? Wot's she got in 'er pockets, I wonder. [*Looks in pockets.*] Wot's 'ere? Oh! ribbons for our white neck, indeed. Wot's 'ere? Ho, indeed. [*Taking paper.*]

JENNY. Wot's that, Mother, a letter?

MRS. P. So this is wot's up, is it? [*She glances at paper.*]

JENNY. [*Peeping.*] It looks like Dick Gurvil's 'and, Mother—

MRS. P. You 'eed your duty. [*Puts paper in her own pocket.*] I'll give it 'er. 'Ere, out of my way. None of your rags in my way. [*Flinging coat into a corner.*]

JENNY. Oh, Mother, it's gone into the pig-wash.

MRS. P. Wot if it 'as?

JENNY. She won't be able to wear it again, Mother. Never.

MRS. P. Let 'er go cold. Learn 'er not to leave 'er things about. Where are you going now?

JENNY. I was just going to hang it out, Mother.

MRS. P. Don't you dare to touch it. Stand 'ere and do your work. Let that dirty gallus-bird do 'er own chores.

JENNY. Whatever do 'ee mean, Mother?

MRS. P. A gallus-bird; that's all she is.

JENNY. Cousin Nan, Mother. Why do 'ee call 'er that?

MRS. P. Oh, p'raps your father 'aven't a-told you.

JENNY. No, Mother.

MRS. P. Run and see if that be Dick with the groceries.

JENNY. [*Goes to window.*] No, Mother.

MRS. P. Drat 'im. Well, this mustn't go beyond yer—it ain't to be known about. 'Er father—your Cousin Nan's father—wot married your father's sister—

JENNY. Yes, Mother.

MRS. P. Don't interrup' when your mother's talking to yer. 'Er father, as she's so stuck on— 'E was 'ung.

JENNY. 'Ung, Mother?

MRS. P. At Glorster ja-il.

JENNY. Whatever 'ad 'e gone for to do?

MRS. P. 'E stole a sheep. That's wot 'e did.

JENNY. And so 'e were 'ung.

MRS. P. There's a thing to 'appen in a family.

JENNY. So be that why Nan come 'ere?

MRS. P. Thanks to your father.

JENNY. I didn't think, when I left service, I should 'sociate with no gallus-birds.

MRS. P. Nor you wouldn't if your father was in 'is right mind. The Lord 'ath laid a 'eavy judgmink on your father. Wot 'e wants with 'er I can't think.

JENNY. Her may remind he of Auntie.

MRS. P. 'E's no call to be reminded of any woman, 'cept 'er the Lord 'ath bound to 'im. Wot I gorn through with that Nan in the 'ouse'd a kill a Zebedee. They do say they be 'ard to kill.

JENNY. 'Ere be father coming.

MRS. P. 'E 'as 'is lunch of a mornin' now. Take 'is cider off the 'ob.

JENNY. Where's 'is bread and cheese? [*She takes mug off hob, looks about carelessly, and drops and smashes mug on hearth.*]

MRS. P. There now.

JENNY. Oh, Mother, I've broke it.

MRS. P. What a clumsy 'and you 'ave.

JENNY. It's father's fav'rit mug. O Mother, whatever will 'e say?

MRS. P. 'Ere. Get upstairs. Get into the next room.

JENNY. Whatever will 'e say! 'E will be mad. [*Cries.*]

MRS. P. I'll talk 'im round. There! It's all a accident. Quick! before 'e comes now.

JENNY. 'E will be that mad! A dear, a dear! [*Goes out.*]

MRS. P. [*Taking out letter.*] So this is wot it's come to: [*Declaiming.*] Dick Gurvil to 'is fond beloved:

"As I was a-walking a lady I did meet
I knew it for my true love by the roses on 'er cheek
The roses on 'er cheek so sweetly did grow
My 'eart out of my bosom, like a engine did go."

I'll watch yer, Master Dick.

[*Enter* MR. PARGETTER, *walking with a stick. He is an old, shortish thick-set man, still hale.*]

MR. P. [*Advancing towards* MRS. P. *and gravely saluting.*] Well, Mother.

MRS. P. Did you see the fiddler?

MR. P. I saw the fiddler.

MRS. P. Is 'e coming to-night?

MR. P. 'E is coming. Us be going to 'ave great wonders to-night. 'Ot mutton parsty pies.

MRS. P. You won't eat of no 'ot mutton parsty pies. You know 'ow that sheep died as well as I do. 'E was *oovy.* [*Pause.*] A apple parsty's no great wonders.

MR. P. A fiddler *and* a apple parsty's wonders.

MRS. P. It'll fare to be a girt wonder if th' apple parsty be set. The amount of 'elp I get in the 'ouse-work—

MR. P. At it again.

MRS. P. Yes, I am at it again, as you call it.

MR. P. What is it, now?

MRS. P. 'Ow much longer 'ave I got to put up with that Nan in the 'ouse?

MR. P. My niece Nan'll stay in this 'ouse till—till I go to churchyard. Or—till she marries. [*A pause.*] Now you know my mind. The girl's a good girl, if you'd let up in your naggin' 'er 'ed off.

MRS. P. Naggin', Will?

MR. P. 'Ow's any girl to be good with you naggin' 'er 'ed off all day long?

MRS. P. When did I ever nag, as you call it?

MR. P. When? 'Ave you ever give 'er a kind word since she come 'ere?

MRS. P. I 'ave my 'eavenly warrant for all I done, Will. Them as the Lord afflicts we must come out from and be ye separate.

A Scene on the Farm at Broad Oak

MR. P. I wonder the Lord can let you prosper, talking like that.

MRS. P. 'E knows 'is own, Will. You mark my words.

MR. P. I will mark 'em. And you mark mine. You'll treat my niece Nan as you'd treat your daughter Jenny.

MRS. P. Our daughter Jenny is the child of respectable parents. That—that charity girl is the daughter of—

MR. P. My sister. That's 'oo she's the daughter of.

MRS. P. And a thief 'oo was 'ung. I've always been respectable; and I've always kep' my girl respectable. I will not 'ave to do with the common and the unclean.

MR. P. You'll 'ave Nan 'ere, and you'll stop your nagging, jealous tongue.

MRS. P. Jealous?

Mr. P. Yes, jealous. You make 'er life a burden acos she tokens my sister. You was sweet on 'er dad yourself. That's why you make 'er life a burden.

Mrs. P. Ho, indeed! Ha, ha, ha! Wot notions.

Mr. P. That's the truth though. I know yer. I seen somethink of yer in these twenty years.

Mrs. P. 'Ark you to me, Will Pargetter. Could you look on and see your daughter wronged?

Mr. P. What's that got to do with it?

Mrs. P. I'll tell you. When first we 'ad that charity girl 'ere—

Mr. P. You call 'er Nan. Wot are you wavin' that bit of paper at me for?

Mrs. P. We 'ad 'opes as our Jenny'd marry Dick Gurvil soon as she come back from service.

MR. P. That depended on Dick, not on Jenny.

MRS. P. Oh, but Dick was no difficulty. They kep' company before Jenny went to service. Dick was sweet on 'er all right.

MR. P. Dick was sweet on twenty girls.

MRS. P. No. Since that—that idle mooner come 'ere—Dick's been sweet on *'er*. Look 'ere. Look at this. [*Shews letter.*]

MR. P. I don't want no letter. Put it where yer got it. That's the best thing I ever 'eard of Dick. Dick wants a wife with sense.

MRS. P. You'll let 'er marry 'im, after 'is carrying on along o' Jenny. And break your own daughter's 'art.

MR. P. Jenny's got no 'art.

MRS. P. Jenny'd resolve 'er 'eavenly crown for Dick Gurvil. 'Ow dare you blacken your own child?

MR. P. Blacken 'er. She 's a cold 'eartless

little baggage, Jenny is. Our Nan's worth a 'undred of 'er.

MRS. P. And you expect me to see that great-eyed, ugly scrawf marrying my daughter's man.

MR. P. He's not your daughter's man. Dick's everybody's daughter's man. If 'e steps up and marries our Nan—it'll be the making of 'im. Give me my lunch.

MRS. P. Ah! I was forgetting. You put me out of patience. I'm afraid I spoke 'asty, Will. I've a 'asty tongue. [*With suavity.*]

MR. P. There, there! Where's my vittles?

[*She puts down bread and cheese.*]

[PARGETTER *gets up to fetch mug from the hob.*]

MR. P. Thank ye, Mother. [*He sees the mug broken.*] Law, Mother. You 'aven't a broke my Toby.

MRS. P. There, there now, Will, it was a accidenk.

MR. P. Not my Toby, broken?

MRS. P. It was a accidenk. [*She picks up the pieces.*]

MR. P. 'Ooever 'ave a broke my Toby. Why weren't I told to onst?

MRS. P. She were goin' to tell yer, she said.

MR. P. Not—not Nan? It wasn't Nan broke it?

MRS. P. 'Er said 'er'd tell you to onst. It was a accidenk.

MR. P. But no accidenk could a broke my Toby.

MRS. P. There, there. Us'll buy another's good as 'er.

MR. P. But I've a 'ad my zider outen ov 'er this fifty year, like my granfer 'ave a-done. I'd a value for that Toby.

MRS. P. 'Er'll tell 'ee 'ow it was. It was a accidenk. She was in a 'urry, you see. Getting things ready for the pearty. It was quite a accidenk.

MR. P. 'Ow could it be quite a accidenk?

MRS. P. 'Er 'ands were wet, you see; she's particular about 'er 'ands—

MR. P. Clumsy 'anded—

MRS. P. They was all soapy from washing. It was quite a accidenk.

MR. P. And so she let it slip.

MRS. P. She didn't see where she was going. The sun was in 'er eyes or somethink. She's goin' to tell yer 'ow it was.

MR. P. My wold Toby jug as Granfer 'ad. 'Er could a broak my 'eart sooner. 'Er could. 'Er could. [*He pushes away his bread and cheese.*] I can't eat my vittles after that. That I can't. Careless girt gowk!

[*Enter* NAN—*Old* PARGETTER *stares at her hard all through this scene.*]

NAN. You be back early, Uncle.

MRS. P. Well?

NAN. Yes, Aunt.

MRS. P. "Yes, Aunt." 'Ave you looked at yourself long enough in the glass?

NAN. What glass?

MRS. P. The glass upstairs.

NAN. The beds are made. I suppose that's what you mean.

MRS. P. That's not the way to talk before your uncle.

NAN. May I help you cut them apples, Aunt?

MRS. P. No, you mayn't 'elp me cut these apples. You get your own work.

NAN. I've done all my work, Aunt.

MRS. P. None of your impudence. [*Very sharply.*]

NAN. I have.

MRS. P. If you 'ave, it's not done properly I know. I've a good mind to make you do it over. A very good mind.

NAN. Is that the dough for the pasty?

MRS. P. None o' yer business.

[NAN *picks up a rolling pin.*]

Put down that pin when you're told.

NAN. I wish you'd let me 'elp, Aunt? Comp'ny be coming at dark.

MRS. P. What's it to do with you? I know w'en comp'ny's coming without your dinnin' it into me.

[NAN *goes softly to the dresser.*]

Wot are you creepin' about on tiptoe for? One'd think you were a thief, like your father.

NAN. [*Meekly.*] I didn't want to disturve you, Aunt.

MRS. P. Disturve me! You couldn't disturve me more if you tried.

NAN. I'm sorry, Aunt.

MRS. P. You know that perfectly well.

NAN. I'm sorry, Aunt.

MRS. P. 'Ere, you give me the fidgets.

NAN. 'Ave you one of your sick headaches, Aunt?

MRS. P. You give me the sick 'edache. One would think you might 'ave 'ad a little grati-tood.

NAN. When I *was* grateful you called me a 'ipocrit.

MRS. P. Oh! *When* was you grateful, as you call it?

NAN. When I first come 'ere. I did my best, I did. I thought you'd like me if I work' 'ard, and 'elped you.

MRS. P. Did yer think!

NAN. I used to make you tea afore you got up of a morning: I wash up the dinner things, so as you could 'ave your nap of a afternoon.

I never let you do the week's washing, not once, since I come 'ere.

MRS. P. One 'ud expect a little something. After all that's been done for you.

NAN. Done for me! What have you ever done for me?

MRS. P. Given you a 'ome.

NAN. A home?

MRS. P. There's not many would 'ave took in a girl 'er dad being 'ung. But I says to your uncle—

NAN. I know what you said to Uncle. That the Rector 'ad asked you to take me in. That's what you said to Uncle. You was afeared the Rector'd let it be known if you refused. You was afeared folk'd get to know you for what you are. That's why you took me in. [*More softly.*] D'ye think I don't know, Aunt? I feel I do. [*Pause.*] And down in the shop they tell me what a friend you've been to me. "Mrs.

Pargetter *'ave* been kind tiv ee," they say. And Mrs. Drew at the Rectory. She's another. "'Ow grateful you must feel towards your aunt." That's what she says. And you smile. You take it all in smiling. You lick your lips over all their praise. Or you play the martyr. You play the martyr. D'ye think I haven't heard you? "A lot of return I get," that's what you say. They praise you for being good to me. *Good! You!* And you make my life here a hell. You lick your lips to make life hell to me. And you tell lies about me. You mean woman. You so holy, you tell lies.

MR. P. [*Angrily.*] Now none of that now. That's enough. You leave the room.

MRS. P. No, she'll not leave the room. I'll learn 'er to be'ave first. [*To* NAN.] I'd have you remember as your daily bread as you're so fond of is give you by me and your uncle.

NAN. Given me?

MRS. P. Per'aps you'll deny as you 'ave your food—God knows you eat enough.

NAN. And every morsel bitter. Bitter. You make it burn in my throat.

MRS. P. And a roof over your 'ed, which is more than your merits.

NAN. So 'as a man in a prison a roof.

MRS. P. Yes. You're right. 'E 'as till 'e's 'ung. And you 'ave your clothes. The very clothes on your back. Talking of clothes, that reminds me. Take that dirty coat of yours out of the pigwash where you put it. I suppose you want to poison the pigs next.

NAN. [*Turning to pigwash trow.*] Oh! 'Oo've bin and done that? [*At the point of tears.*] I suppose you think it funny to spoil a poor girl's clothes. And now it's spoiled. [*She takes ribbon from pocket.*] And this is spoiled. What I'd saved up for. Now I shan't have any. You put that in the trow. You know you did.

On the Way to the Hamlet

MRS. P. You say I put your dirty things in the trow and I'll put you in. Talk like that to me, will yer? One of these days I'll give you the cart whip, like what you deserve.

NAN. [*Turning to hide tears.*] You read your Bible, and you go to church, and you do a thing like that. You put a poor girl's coat in the trow and as good as deny it afterwards.

MR. P. Now come, come, come. 'Ow d'yer expect to be ready for to-night? Let's 'ave no more catanddoggin' here.

MRS. P. I'm not talking to you. 'Old yer peace. [*Furiously at interruption.*] I'm talking to *you*. [*To* NAN.] You're a black, proud, ungrateful cat. Wot your 'eart'll look like on the Day of Judgemink beats me.

NAN. Oh! [*Contemptuously—she opens out the sopping coat.*]

MRS. P. I'll give yer "oh." 'Ere. Don't go dripping the pigwash all about the place. You

drop it. Give it to me 'ere—'ere. [*She snatches at the coat and tries to wrench it from* NAN'S *hands.*]

NAN. Don't you dare to touch it. Let go of it.

MRS. P. Will yer. Leggo now.

NAN. I won't. No you don't. You'll tear it in another minute. I'll kill you if you tear it.

MRS. P. Wot'll you?

NAN. I'll kill you. I'll kill you.

MRS. P. [*Putting both hands to the coat and wrenching it free; then slashing it into* NAN'S *face.*] I'll show you 'oo's mistress 'ere, my lady. Now—see. [*She tears the collar off and stamps on it.*] There. You'll do what you're told 'ere, my lady.

[NAN *holds table and glares at her aunt, then picks up the cutting knife.*]

NAN. [*Slowly.*] My dad gave me that coat. [*A pause.*] My dad.

MRS. P. Mind, Will, she's got the knife in 'er 'and.

PAR. [*Going to her.*] Give me thicky knife. [*He takes it from her.*] No temper 'ere. I've got one score against you already. Wot's come to you to-day?

MRS. P. The devil's come to 'er. She's pretty near tore my arm off.

NAN. [*Slowly.*] You be careful.

MRS. P. But I'll teach yer.

NAN. You be careful.

PAR. Nan, you go to your room.

[NAN *sullenly picks up the torn coat and then bursts into tears.*]

NAN. My dad give me this coat. It's a dear coat. [*She smooths out the torn and crumpled stuff.*] And now it's all torn. [*The* PARGETTERS *watch her with a sort of hard scorn.*] I'll never be able to wear en again. Oh, my dad, I wish I was dead. I wish I was dead.

PAR. No sinful talk like that, now. I won't 'ave it.

NAN. Uncle! I 'ave tried, I 'ave, Uncle.

PAR. Don't turn to me, girl. You'd ought to turn to God—giving way to the devil—No —and you've not been straight. If you'd told me at once I'd 'ave let it pass. Though I felt it. [*A pause, then testily.*] Come now, be straight. That's above all things. [*A pause,* NAN *sobs.*] Eh? [NAN *sobs.*]

MR. P. [*Rising.*] 'Aven't you something to tell me?

NAN. No! No!

PAR. [*Grimly.*] I thought you 'ad. [*Turning.*]

NAN. Oh, Uncle! Do 'ee.

MR. P. [*Going.*] I didn't think it of you.

NAN. Uncle.

MR. P. I didn't think it.

[Exit]

MRS. P. [*Going up to her.*] I'll make your belly bitter, like in the Bible.

NAN. You! Oh! [*Turns from her.*] Oh, Dad, I wish I were with 'ee, I do.

MRS. P. [*Bitterly.*] You'll spoil yer looks for to-night, I shouldn't wonder. You won't 'ave yer young men neighing after yer. Dirty 'ogs.

[NAN *picks up apples and begins to cut them, still crying.*]

MRS. P. I'll watch you with your young men! I'm not going to 'ave no mothers coming round complaining.

NAN. [*Slowly.*] I 'ope you may never feel wot I feel.

[*Enter* JENNY.]

JENNY. Mawther!

MRS. P. 'Ush!

JENNY. There be Dick's trap with the groceries.

MRS. P. Time too. 'Ere [*to* NAN] go and get them!

NAN. Me?

MRS. P. Yes, you. 'Oo else. Do something for your living for once in a way.

[*Exit* NAN.]

JENNY. Mother, wot 'ave Dad say?

MRS. P. 'Ush yer tongue. I've made *that* right.

JENNY. O Mother. I thort 'e'd 'ave my 'ed off for it.

MRS. P. Never you 'eed of that. I've somethink else to say to you. That girl, Nan—

JENNY. Wot, Mother?

MRS. P. [*Speaking very rapidly.*] You better watch out she don't tread a thy corns, as well as thy mother's she've a done.

JENNY. Wot do 'ee mean, Mother?

MRS. P. Dick Gurvil's 'oo I mean.

JENNY. Oh!

MRS. P. Yes, Dick Gurvil! She've set 'er cap at Dick.

JENNY. Oh!

MRS. P. [*Mimicking.*] Oh! Oh! *Yes,* and Dick be sweet on 'er.

JENNY. I don't care, Mother.

MRS. P. Yes, you do care. 'Ave done o' your folly.

JENNY. Dick can please 'isself so far as I'm concerned, I'm sure.

MRS. P. No 'e can't please 'isself, as you call it. 'Oo else'd yer get if you lose 'im? You take a man when you can get 'im. There ain't too many, let me tell yer.

JENNY. I do-an't care, I'm sure. I don't want no men.

MRS. P. Don't you want. You listen to me. You got ter want. Whether you like or not. I ain't goin' to 'ave you the talk of the town.

JENNY. Lor, Mother! I didn't think of that.

MRS. P. No, I know you didn't think.

JENNY. Lor, Mother.

MRS. P. 'Oo 'ad 'er man took by a gallus-bird.

JENNY. Would they say that, Mother?

MRS. P. 'Oo's she to take Dick Gurvil? If you'd any pride—

JENNY. Be you sure she be a-trying for Dick?

MRS. P. Well, you best find out.

JENNY. I'll watch it, I will.

MRS. P. [*As* NAN *enters.*] Ah! you'd a better! Now I got to see to the 'ouse-work. I'll expect you to 'ave everythink ready against I come back. [*To* NAN.] You may think as you're someone. I'll learn you different. None o' your tricks, 'ere. No! Nor none of your

mother's carryings on. [*A pause.*] With men. That's wot I mean . . . Gallus-bird.

[*She goes out,* NAN *draws a chair to the table —*JENNY *is already seated—and begins to cut apples. She is crying. She gathers the torn coat together tenderly.*]

JENNY. Never mind mother, Nan. She don't mean nothin'!

NAN. I don't—

JENNY. She be only put out by 'avin' comp'ny to-night.

NAN. It's not! It's not! Oh, she'd ought to leave my father.

JENNY. There, there now—let I get 'ee some warm warter off the 'ob. Your eyes'll be as red as red.

NAN. I don't care, I don't care.

JENNY. Why, come now. Us be going to be girt friends, us be, ben't us? Mother be a 'ard woman to please. But 'er don't mean it.

NAN. Her do speak so bitter. They be all against me! The 'ole world be against me.

JENNY. [*With bowl of water and a handkerchief.*] Do 'ee jest mop thy eyes. Or let I.

NAN. It be kind of you to trouble. What a girt silly I be to cry so!

JENNY. Your eyes'll be as red. Come, come! There be 'andsome young men a-comin'. I wouldn't wonder as they be all sweet on you! I wouldn't wonder as you'd 'ave a sweet'eart some Easter.

NAN. A sweet'eart! A charity girl!

JENNY. Don't take it to 'eart. Us be goin' to be friends, ben't us, dear?

NAN. It be kind of you to speak kind.

JENNY. And us'll go out of a Sunday. Why, us'll be girt friends. It go to my 'eart to think of thy trouble.

NAN. Will 'ee be a friend, Cousin Jenny?

At Broad Oak

JENNY. There, there. Wot pretty eyes you 'ave. Your 'air's thicker than mine. 'Ow you do a set it off. Us'll 'ave no secrets, will us?

NAN. 'Ee will be my friend, won't 'ee, Jenny? Do-an't 'ee be agen me—I couldn't bear it if you turned against me. I've sometimes been near killing myself since I came here. Your mother's been that bitter to me.

JENNY. Don't 'ee say such things.

NAN. Jenny, I'll tell 'ee why I didn't kill myself.

JENNY. Lord, Nan, doa-n't 'ee.

NAN. I want 'ee to bear with me, Jenny. I'll tell 'ee why I didn't kill myself. I thought . . . there . . . it's only nonsense. Did you ever think about men, Jenny? About loving a man? About marriage?

JENNY. I've 'oped to 'ave a 'ome of my own. And not to be a burden 'ere and that.

NAN. Ah! But about 'elping a man?

JENNY. A man 'as strength. 'E ought to 'elp a woman.

NAN. I could 'elp a man, Jenny.

JENNY. Wot ideyers you do 'ave!

NAN. When a girl's 'eart is breaking, Jenny, she 'as ideyers.

JENNY. Ah!

NAN. Jenny!

JENNY. Yes, Nan?

NAN. I've never talked to a woman like this afore. I felt I'd die if I couldn't talk to someone.

JENNY. I know, exackly!

NAN. When I see you so kind, and you so pretty, Jenny, I felt I must speak.

JENNY. Do you think me pretty, Nan?

NAN. Yes, Jenny.

JENNY. In service they thought me pretty. All but cook.

NAN. You are pretty, Jenny.

JENNY. Cook was a unpleasant old thing. She did 'er 'air in papers. No ladies do their 'air in papers! Ow! she was 'orrid of a morning. O! the waste I see go on in that 'ouse. They 'ad pastry every day. And the ladies had milk and biscuits at eleven of a morning.

NAN. You must tell me all your secrets, Jenny.

JENNY. That I will. And will 'ee tell I all yourn?

NAN. If you like, Jenny.

JENNY. And will 'ee tell I when you 'ave a sweet'eart?

NAN. Ah! A sweet'eart. You must tell me about yours, Jenny.

JENNY. Ah! I ain't got one yet.

NAN. 'Aven't you, Jenny?

JENNY. Noa. Not one special like.

NAN. You'll 'ave one soon, Jenny. O Jenny, I hope you'll be very 'appy.

JENNY. Love be queer, ben't it? The things it makes people do. Could 'ee fancy a man, Nan?

NAN. Perhaps.

JENNY. Ugly girt scrawfs, I think they be.

NAN. Not all of them.

JENNY. Perhaps you 'ave a fancy, Nan? 'Ave you, dear? 'Ave you? 'Oo be it, Nan? Tell me, dearie. I wouldn't tell a single soul. Tell me, Nan. You said as you'd 'ave no secrets from me.

NAN. Ah!

JENNY. Is it anyone I know?

[NAN *goes to her and puts an arm round her and kisses her.*]

NAN. Yes, dear.

JENNY. Be it Artie Pearce?

NAN. No, Jenny.

JENNY. 'Oo be it. It be a shame not to tell me!

NAN. Jenny dear?

JENNY. Yes, Nan. Tell me now. Whisper.

NAN. It be Dick Gurvil, Jenny.

JENNY. Dick Gurvil?

NAN. I love him. I love him.

JENNY. Do you love him very much?

NAN. It feel like my 'eart was in flower, Jenny.

JENNY. Ah! It must. [*A pause.*] I 'ope you'll be very 'appy. You and Mr. Gurvil.

NAN. God bless you, Jenny.

JENNY. What eyes you have got, Cousin Nan. To think of you fancying Dick! It *be* nice to 'ave you for a friend, Cousin Nan.

NAN. Kiss me, dear. You've never kissed me.

JENNY. There! Go and bathe thy eyes, Nan. They'll be red if 'ee don't. 'Ee mustn't

'ave them red for Dick to-night. Bathe 'em in cold.

NAN. I could cry, I could. [*She goes slowly out.*]

JENNY. [*At the other door.*] *Mother.* [*A pause.*] [*Softly.*] Mother.

MRS. P. [*Off.*] Yes!

JENNY. Come 'ere a moment.

MRS. P. [*Wiping her hands.*] What d'yer want now?

JENNY. About Nan.

MRS. P. Wot? Wot about 'er?

JENNY. [*Giggling.*] She be soft on Dick, Mother. Her've a-told me.

MRS. P. Ho!

JENNY. [*Giggling.*] Us'll 'ave to watch it, Mother.

MRS. P. I'll watch it.

CURTAIN

ACT II

Scene:—The kitchen. NAN *tidying up. She places tray, glasses and bottle in inner room.*

NAN. [*Sings.*] . . .

Blow, blow, thou winds of winter blow,
And cover me with sparklen snow,
And tear the branches from the tree,
And strew the dead leaves over me.

DICK. [*Coming in.*] Miss Nan.

NAN. Why, Mr. Gurvil! What a start you give me. You be early.

DICK. Ah? When'll the others be 'ere?

NAN. Not yet. It's not half past yet.

DICK. When'll the others—Mrs. Pargetter—be down?

NAN. They won't be down this ten minutes. They be dressing.

DICK. And 'aven't the fiddler come?

NAN. No.

DICK. Per'aps I'd a better go out again.

NAN. No. Come in and sit down, Mr. Dick. They'll be 'ere direckly. I'll be done. Tell me the news in the great world. What be 'appening?

DICK. They do say there be a criminal a-broak loose. Out of Glorster jail.

NAN. Indeed!

DICK. And come 'idin' 'ere somewhere, they think.

NAN. What makes them think that?

DICK. I dunno. But there be a Bow Street runner. And there be a gentleman come. They were askin' where Parson live. They must be 'avin' a hue and cry. Hope they'll catch 'im and 'ang 'im. I'd like to sick the dogs at 'em.

NAN. They be 'uman beings, like us be, Mr. Dick.

DICK. [*Undoing his neck-cloth.*] No, they ben't like us. That be where you women go wrong. Along of your 'earts, that is. I'd like to see all criminals 'anged. Then us honest ones might fare to prosper. [*He takes off neck-cloth.*]

NAN. What'll you take, Mr. Dick, after your walk?

DICK. What be going?

NAN. 'Ave some zider and a cake. They be in the next room, ready.

DICK. If it ben't troubling you, I ull.

[NAN *fetches mug and plate.*]

DICK. [*Taking a cake.*] I'd ought to be a-waiting on you, not you a-waiting on me. Only I 'aven't any angel-cakes 'ere. None but angel-cakes 'd be fit eating for you, Miss Nan.

NAN. Oh, now, I wonder how many girls you've made that speech to.

DICK. None, I never.

NAN. Well, I hope you like your cake?

DICK. It be beautiful. A spice-cake, when it be split and buttered, and just set to the fire, so as the butter runs. I don't mean to toast it; but just set to the fire, and then just a sprinkle of sugar to give it a taste. No so as to make it sweet, you know. It go down like roses. Like kissing a zweet'eart at 'arvest time. When the girt moon be zhining.

NAN. If they be all that to you, Mr. Dick, you must 'ave another. Try and think the clock be the moon a-zhining.

[*She gets more cakes.*]

DICK. It be lovely 'aving cakes and you bringing them to me. [*Bites.*] But there ben't no sugar, not on this one. Miss Nan, will 'ee

jest put thy pretty 'and on this cake, and then it'll be sugared lovely.

NAN. I'm not going to do anything so silly. 'Ere. Take this one. This one be sugared.

DICK. [*Eating.*] It 'ud be just 'eaven if you'd 'ave 'alf of it. So's I might feel—some-'ow—as—

NAN. No. I won't 'ave any. 'Ave another drop of zider.

DICK. [*Tasting.*] Your zider be too peert, Miss Nan. I like zider to be peert, like I likes my black puddens done, up to a point. But zider's peert's this—I tell you what it want. It want to 'ave a apple roast therein, and a sod toast therein, and then it want to 'ave a nutmeg grated ever so light, not rough, yer know. And then it be made mellow, like, like tart of a Sunday.

NAN. Why, Mr. Dick, you'd ought to have been a cook, I think.

DICK. My father say to me—"Mind thy innards," he say. I 'ad to do for my father, arter mother died. Very pertiklar about his innards dad were. I learned about innards from 'im.

NAN. It be wonderful to 'ave a father to do for. To think as he knowed 'ee when you were a little un. To think as perhaps 'e give up lots o' things, so's you might fare to be great in the world.

DICK. My dad never give up. 'E said 'e try it once, just to try like. It never'd 'ave suit my dad.

NAN. It be always 'ard for a man to give up, even for a child, they say. But a woman 'as to give up. You don't know. You never think per'aps what a woman gives up. She gives up 'er beauty and 'er peace. She gives up 'er share of joy in the world. All to bear a little one; as per'aps'll not give 'er bread when 'er be wold.

On the Green

DICK. I wonder women ever want to 'ave children. They be so beautiful avore they 'ave children. They 'ave their red cheeks, so soft. And sweet lips so red's red. And their eyes bright, like stars a-zhining. And oh, such white soft 'ands. Touch one of 'em, and you 'ave like shoots all down. Beau-ti-vul. Love-lee.

NAN. It be a proud thing to 'ave a beauty to raise love in a man.

DICK. And after. I seen the same girls, with their 'ands all rough of washing-day, and their fingers all scarred of stitching. And their cheeks all flaggin', and sunk. And dull as toads' bellies, the colour of 'em. And their eyes be 'eavy, like a foundered wold ewe's when 'er time be on 'er. And lips all bit. And there they do go with the backache on 'em. Pitiful, I call it. Draggin' their wold raggy skirts. And the baby crying. And little Dick with 'is nose all bloody, fallen in the grate. And little Sairey

fell in the yard, and 'ad 'er 'air mucked. Ah! Ugh! It go to my 'eart.

NAN. Ah, but that ben't the all of love, Mr. Dick. It be 'ard to see beauty gone, and joy gone, and a light 'eart broke. But it be wonderful for to 'ave little ones. To 'ave brought life into the world. To 'ave 'ad them little live things knocking on your 'eart, all them months. And then to feed them. 'Elpless like that.

DICK. They be pretty, little ones be, when they be kept clean and that. I likes 'earing them sing 'imns. I likes watching the little boys zwimming in the river. They be so white and swift, washing themselves. And the splashin' do shine zo. Diamonds. 'Oo be coming 'ere to-night—'sides us?

NAN. Old Gaffer Pearce be a-comin' to fiddle.

DICK. He'd ought to be in mad'ouse, Gaffer

did. Dotty owd gape. He ben't wholly stalwart in uns brains, folk do observe. But—

NAN. He been a beautiful fiddler.

DICK. He been a wonder, that old man 'ave.

NAN. 'E play wonderful still, when 'e gets thinking of old times, and of 'is girl as 'e calls 'er. Why, she've been dead fifty years and more.

DICK. She was beautiful. They call 'er the Star of the West. My dad 'ave tell of 'er. She 'ad a face like cream.

NAN. He made beautiful poems to 'er; and music, 'e did. I 'eard 'im sing 'is poems once. He was fiddlin' quiet-like, all the time 'e were a-singing; and the tears standing in 'is eyes. 'E's never been quite right since the Lord 'ad mercy on 'er.

DICK. 'Oo else's comin' 'sides Gaffer?

NAN. Tommy and Artie. What a 'andsome boy Artie be grown.

DICK. Ah? I 'ear 'em say that. I couldn't ever see it.

NAN. He be just like his mother. Black and comely.

DICK. I likes a good black. I likes a good brown, a good bay brown. I likes a good black too. There be bright blacks and there be dull blacks. Now what be the black as I likes? Your 'air is jest the very colour. Beautiful I call it.

NAN. [*Getting up.*] If you ben't going to 'ave more zider I'll take your mug, Mr. Dick. Mr. Dick.

DICK. Yes.

NAN. We've 'ad a sheep die on us last week. Don't you 'ave none of our 'ot mutton pies to-night.

DICK. Ah? I 'ope you'll give me twice of trotters, instead like, I can do with a trotter, I

can. I s'pose us be going to 'ave great times 'ere to-night, Miss Nan.

NAN. Yes, indeed. Us'll dance the moon down to-night.

DICK. I s'pose you be a girt lady to dance?

NAN. I've not dance now, for more'n a year, Mr. Dick.

DICK. I s'pose you 'ad dancings when you were to 'ome.

NAN. Us used to dance on our doorsteps at 'ome. There was an old man used to fiddle to us. Every night there was a moon, we danced. The girls would dance in their pattens. They used to go clack, clack, their feet did. You'd a thought it was drums, Mr. Dick.

DICK. I wish I'd bin there to 'ave dance with you.

NAN. And then we used to sing "Joan to the Maypole" and "Randal" and all the old

songs. And there'd be beetles a buzzin'. And sometimes one of the shepherds come with 'is flute. It was nice at 'ome, then.

DICK. What times us be 'avin' since you come 'ere. It be always sad to leave 'ome. But I s'pose you'll be going back afore long. Your dad and your mother'll be a-wanting you. Sure to be.

NAN. They be dead, Mr. Dick.

DICK. Now, be they indeed! Mrs. Pargetter do talk's though you 'ad both your folk.

NAN. Mrs. Pargetter! She has 'er reasons, Mr. Dick, for letting folk think that.

DICK. What reasons can 'er 'ave for that, Miss Nan?

NAN. Some day, per'aps I'll tell you 'er reasons. Now let I take your coat and that.

[*She takes coat, hat, etc., and puts them in inner room. Then re-enters.*]

DICK. 'Ow brave you be a-looking, Miss Nan.

NAN. Soap and water tells, they do say.

DICK. You be all roses, Miss Nan. And you be all lilies.

NAN. Why, Mr. Dick! You be quite the courtier.

DICK. Ah! [*Producing a rose.*] Miss Nan?

NAN. Yes?

DICK. I brought a rose—

NAN. For Jenny, Mr. Dick?

DICK. No, for 'ee. Will 'ee wear it, Miss Nan?

NAN. Yes, if you'll give it to me.

DICK. 'Ere it be. Will 'ee say thank you for it?

NAN. Thank you, Mr. Dick. What a beautiful rose!

DICK. 'Er be a Campden Wonder. 'Er be red. Like love. Love be red. Like roses.

NAN. Oh!

DICK. I see that rose growing, Miss Nan —an' I—I thought 'er'd look beautiful if—if —if you were wearing of 'er, like.

NAN. Well, I hope it does.

DICK. You put 'er to the blush, Miss Nan —Miss Nan—

NAN. Yes?

DICK. Will you do I a favour?

NAN. What is it?

DICK. Will 'ee wear that rose in your hair?

NAN. In my hair, Mr. Dick! Why?

DICK. I 'ad a dream once of you with roses in your hair.

NAN. [*Putting rose in her hair.*] In the old times women always put roses in their hair. When they danced, they wore roses in their

hair. The rose-leaves fell all about 'en, my mother told me.

DICK. It looks like it were growing out of your 'ed.

NAN. I must light the lamp.

DICK. No, don't 'ee. Don't 'ee.

NAN. [*Striking a match.*] They must have looked beautiful, those women must, in the old time. There was songs made of them. Beauty be a girt gift, Mr. Dick.

DICK. It be wonderful in a woman.

NAN. It makes a woman like God, Mr. Dick.

DICK. You be beautiful, Nan; you be beautiful.

NAN. Ah, Mr. Dick.

DICK. You be beautiful. You be like a fairy. The rose. You be beautiful like in my dream.

NAN. Ah! Let go my hands. Let go my hands.

DICK. You be beautiful. Your eyes. And your face so pale. And your hair with the rose. O Nan, you be lovely. You be lovely!

NAN. O don't! Don't!

DICK. My love, my beloved.

NAN. Ah!

DICK. I love you, O Nan, I love you.

NAN. Let me go: let me go, please.

DICK. Do 'ee care for me? Do 'ee love me, Nan?

NAN. You don't know! You don't know! You don't know about me.

DICK. I love you.

NAN. Ah! You mustn't. You mustn't love me.

DICK. There be no high queen 'as a beauty like yours, Nan.

NAN. O! let me go.

DICK. My love! My 'andsome!

NAN. O! Dick.

DICK. Nan, O Nan, do 'ee love me?

NAN. Ah!

DICK. Dear sweet. Will 'ee mary me? Do 'ee love me?

NAN. I love you, Dick.

DICK. My love! My pretty!

NAN. My dear love.

DICK. My beautiful. I'll make a song for you, my beautiful.

NAN. Your loving me, that's song enough.

DICK. Nan, dear, let I take the pins out of your hair. Let me 'ave your 'air all loose. Your lovely hair. O Nan, you be a beautiful woman.

NAN. Ah, God! I wish I were beautiful.

DICK. Dear love, you be.

NAN. More beautiful. Then I'd 'ave more to give you.

DICK. Kiss me. Kiss me!

NAN. There be my 'air, Dick. It ben't much, after all.

DICK. [*Kissing the hair.*] Oh, beautiful. Beau-ti-vul. My own Nan.

NAN. I am yours, my beloved.

DICK. When shall us be married? When shall us come together?

NAN. Ah, my love! Now is enough. Now is enough.

DICK. When shall us marry?

NAN. Kiss me.

DICK. Shall it be Michaelmas?

NAN. Kiss me. Kiss me.

DICK. My winsome. My beauty.

NAN. Now loose me, darling. [*They break.*] I have had my moment. I have been happy.

DICK. Nan! Nan!

NAN. I cannot marry you. O Dick, 'ee must go away. Go away. [*He goes toward her.*] Don't 'ee. Us can never marry. You'd 'ate me if you knew. I can't tell you. Not

The Lanes, Broad Oak

to-night, dear. They'll be coming down directly. If I married you, Dick? Oh, I can't. I can't—if I married you—if we lived 'ere—I might bring shame upon you. They'd call names after me. They'd know. They'd know.

DICK. My pretty! My Nan. Tell thy Dick.

NAN. Ah, no, no. Don't touch me. You don't know yet. I'm—not a fit—I'm not a fit woman for you to marry, Dick. My father. My poor dad. [*She breaks down.*] O Dick! O Dick! You don't know what sorrows I gone through. I think my 'eart'll break.

DICK. There, there, Nan. Tell thy Dick. My poor dearie. You be my dear love now, Nan.

NAN. If you love me, Dick—O, my love! Us together! Us needn't fear what they say. Us could go away, Dick. To America. Us'd be 'appy there. O Dick, take me out of this.

All we 'ave is our lives, Dick. With love, us'd never want. Us'd 'ave that, my love. Take me, Dick.

DICK. I'll take you, darling. To-night. To-night I'll tell them.

NAN. In spite of—even if—what I 'ave to say?

DICK. No matter what it is, dear. To-night, now. To-night. When the fiddler comes.

NAN. Ah! my beloved!

DICK. I'll claim you. Before them all, I'll claim you.

NAN. Your wife, my blessed.

DICK. Kiss me, once more, dear.

NAN. Before they come.

[*Outside the door there is a shuffling and giggling.*]

A VOICE. They be in. I hear 'em.

A VOICE. They ben't.

A VOICE. Don't Artie. [*Together, rapidly.*]

A VOICE. Sh!

A VOICE. All together.

A VOICE. One after the other.

DICK. Here they are.

NAN. My beloved! My own.

VOICES.

"Joan, to the maypole away let us on
The time is short and will be gone—"

[*They stop and giggle.*]

ANOTHER. They ben't.

[*One hums the tune.*]

DICK. To-night. Before them all. When the fiddle begins. My wife.

NAN. My husband.

VOICES. "Where your beauties may be seen." Bang! Bang! Bang!

[*They knock the door. The* LOVERS *break.* MRS. PARGETTER *and* JENNY *run downstairs as* NAN *flings the door open. Enter old* GAFFER

PEARCE, ARTIE *of that ilk,* TOMMY ARKER *and two* GIRLS.]

MRS. P. 'Ere you be. 'Ow nice it is to see you. [*She kisses the girls and looks hard at* NAN.]

JENNY. [*To* DICK.] Ah, Mr. Gurvil. 'Ave you brought I the rose as you promised?

DICK. You don't want no roses.

JENNY. You ain't very polite, Mr. Dick.

DICK. You got roses in your cheeks, you 'ave.

MRS. P. 'Ow be you, gaffer?

[*General salutation.*]

ARTIE. Granfer doan't 'ear you, unless you 'it 'im. [*Shouts in his ear.*] 'Ow be you, granfer?

GAFFER. [*Looking at* NAN.] Twice I seen her, twice. Her've gone by on the road. With a rose in 'er 'air. And 'er eyes shone. Twice. In April.

ARTIE. 'Ere, gaffer! Sit down 'ere. 'E can fiddle still, th'owd granfer do; but 'e doan't talk, not to strangers.

A GIRL. Us seed some strangers in the village, Mrs. Pargetter.

MRS. P. Ah?

TOM. They were askin' where your 'ouse was. Them and parson.

ARTIE. 'Ave you been a-robbin', Mrs. Pargetter?

MRS. PAR. A-robbin'! No. I 'ave enough of thieves without me going stealin', I 'ope.

ARTIE. Well. One of 'em be a runner, 'e be.

DICK. Yes, for I seed 'en too.

MRS. P. O! So you didn't come with th' others, then, Dick?

DICK. Noa. But I seen 'en.

ALL. I wonder whatever they do want!

MRS. PAR. Well. If they're coming 'ere, us

shall soon know. I should a-thought the pleece could a-caught their own thieves.

[*Old* PARGETTER *comes downstairs, buttoning his waistcoat.*]

MR. P. Aha! Aha!

ALL. 'Ow be you, Mr. Pargetter?

MR. PAR. [*Saluting.*] Why, 'ow beautiful all you girls be looking! 'Ullo, Dick! You be quite the bridegroom. Why gaffer, what a old Pocahontas you be, to be sure! 'Ave you brought your fiddle?

GAFFER. [*Still staring at* NAN.] 'Oo be her? On the roads, shining, I've seen 'er. Scattering blossoms, blossoms.

JENNY. [*After glancing at* GAFFER.] So you come 'ere early, Dick. Why Nan, do look. You 'aven't a-done your 'air. Look, Mother, at Nan's 'air!

MRS. PAR. What in the name of Fate d'you

'ave that rose in your 'air for? Any why d'yer come down with your 'air like that?

NAN. I had to open the door. I had to light the candle.

GAFFER. Give I a cup of red wine and a cup of white wine, and honey. [*Coming towards her.*] And a apple and a—I be goin' to fiddle joy to the feet of the bride.

ARTIE. You be going to do wonders, you be. Sit down, you old stupe. Ain't no bride 'ere.

MR. P. [*To the* GIRLS.] There be brides for us all. With all you lovely young things. Nothing like 'aving a sweet'eart. Now! You ladies, you'll want to take off your things.

ARTIE. 'Ow about us?

MR. PAR. One sect at a time. Like the sheep goin' through a 'edge. Per'aps you ladies'll go upstairs with Nan and Jenny 'ere.

NAN. Come, Ellen.

JENNY. 'Ere! Give I your brolly.

[*The* GIRLS *go upstairs.*]

MR. PAR. Now, you gentlemen. Come on in 'ere with me. [*He leads them to the inner room.*]

MRS. PAR. [*As* DICK *follows.*] Oh, Dick.

DICK. Ess, Mrs. Pargetter.

MRS. PAR. I see you 'ave your things off. Just 'elp me a moment, there's a good lad.

DICK. Ess, Mrs. Pargetter. What do 'e want done?

MRS. PAR. Us must 'ave all clear for dancing. I'll nip them candles over 'ere to the dresser. There. Now 'elp me lift the table over. There! You was 'ere early, wasn't yer, Dick?

DICK. Nothin' to speak of. 'Ow about them chairs?

MRS. PAR. They'll do nicely. I suppose Nan let you in?

At Broad Oak

DICK. Ess. Miss Nan done.

MRS. PAR. You two been 'aving a fine game, I know.

DICK. Ah?

MRS. PAR. Don't tell me you 'aven't. Did she kiss yer?

DICK. [*Sullenly.*] Never you mind.

MRS. PAR. Oh, I don't mind. But I got eyes, I 'ave.

DICK. Oh! What good 'ave they done yer?

MRS. PAR. O, when I see a girl with 'er face all flushed, and 'er 'air all 'anging down, and a rose stuck over 'er ear, and a young man by 'er as flustered as what you are—Well—I can—

DICK. What can you?

MRS. PAR. Well, I know they don't come like that of their own.

DICK. [*Sullenly.*] Do you?

MRS. PAR. I ain't blaming yer, mind.

DICK. Aren't yer?

MRS. PAR. I know what it is to be young, myself. But all the same—

DICK. What?

MRS. PAR. Oh, nothing.

DICK. What were you going to say?

MRS. PAR. Nothing.

DICK. You were going to say something.

MRS. PAR. No, I weren't. Only it mid seem strange. You see, your dad's so partikler.

DICK. Oh! 'Im.

MRS. PAR. 'As 'e took you in 'is partner yet? Your dad?

DICK. No.

MRS. PAR. No, I know 'e 'aven't. I could tell yer something. A little surprise—about your dad.

DICK. What's that?

MRS. PAR. Somethin' 'e said to me. I don't know as I've a right to tell yer.

DICK. Abut my being took in as partner to 'im?

MRS. PAR. It was meant as a secret. But there—since—us can 'ave no secrets, can us?

DICK. Why, no—I'm—

MRS. PAR. Well—your dad says to me, "Mrs. Pargetter" 'e says, "I'm gettin' to be a old man, I want to see my boy settled. Now then," 'e says, "The day my boy marries I 'ave 'im bound my partner. And £20 to 'elp 'im furnish."

DICK. Good iron! A old chanti-cleer. Balm in Gilead, as the saying is.

MRS. PAR. "Yes," I says, "And more no mother could ask." [*Change of voice.*] That girl'd forsake 'er 'eavenly crown for you, Dick. She's drooped like a lily of the vale since she's been away. If you'd seen that girl as I seen 'er, you'd 'ave yourself arst this Sunday. Or

you'll 'ave 'er goin' into a decline. 'Ave you arst 'er yet?

DICK. Yes. I arst 'er just now. Just this minute ago.

MRS. PAR. When she was at the door 'ere?

DICK. When I come in.

MRS. PAR. Wot did she say, I wonder? No tellin', I suppose?

DICK. I thought as you'd seen. I mean, from what you said.

MRS. PAR. No. I never seed.

DICK. From 'er 'avin' 'er 'air down. The rose and that.

MRS. PAR. 'Air down? She 'adn't 'er 'air down. I done it myself.

DICK. Yes, she 'ad 'er 'air down. You said—just now—

MRS. PAR. Jenny 'ad?

DICK. No, Nan.

MRS. PAR. Nan: wot's she got to do with it?

DICK. I've just arst 'er to marry me, Mrs. Pargetter. And her 'ave said yes. [*A pause.*] It'll be nice bein' a partner and that, won't it. I'll be able to 'ave the trap of a evenin'. And I'll 'ave money for—

MRS. PAR. [*Grimly.*] *You* be 'is partner! You'll be your dad's partner if you marry Jenny—that's your dad's arrangement. That's wot 'e's planned.

DICK. My dad 'ave planned—

MRS. PAR. "'E shall marry as I choose," 'e says, "my son shall. If 'e don't know which side 'is bread is buttered, there's the door. 'E can beg."

DICK. 'E can beg!

MRS. PAR. "Not a penny will 'e ever 'ave from *me*," 'e says. Now.

[MRS. PARGETTER *watches him.*]

DICK. So!

MRS. PAR. D'you think we'd let you throw Jenny over, after getting 'er talked about?

DICK. It be different 'avin' a kiss or two of a girl and wantin' to marry 'er.

[*Re-enter* PARGETTER *slowly, looking hard at* DICK *who is very white. He walks to the dresser, picks up a corkscrew, and walks slowly out, looking hard at* DICK *but saying nothing.*]

MRS. PAR. Now then.

DICK. [*Moistening his lips.*] Per'aps my father'll 'ear me explain.

MRS. PAR. Wot'll you tell 'im?

DICK. Tell 'im as Jenny ain't no more to me 'n what a pig's milt is. Tell 'im as I love Nan. And as I be goin' to marry 'er.

MRS. PAR. [*Slowly and grimly.*] You'll tell 'im for instans, you'll tell your father, for instans, as you're goin' to marry a girl whose dad was 'ung at Glorster, like the thief 'e was. Just afore last Christmas.

DICK. Nan's dad wos?

MRS. PAR. [*Nods her head.*] And 'er mother 'ad men come to see 'er. [*A pause.*] 'Ow'll yer tell that to yer dad?

DICK. My Lord Almighty! Daughter of one of them!

MRS. PAR. Two of them.

DICK. My 'oly Saviour!

MRS. PAR. Your 'art out of your bosom like a engine it does go.

DICK. I'll marry 'er yet to spite yer.

MRS. PAR. Wot'll yer marry 'er on? You ain't got a penny. She ain't got a penny. [*A pause.*] I wonder she never told yer about 'er dad's being 'ung. They 'ad yeomanry in front of the gaol. Quite an affair. Didn't she never tell yer?

DICK. No. 'Er was going to. My! Oh my—

MRS. PAR. Per'aps she waited till she 'ooked yer. 'Ark at 'em in there!

[*Laughter inside and one crows like a cock.*] She is artful. I never see a deeper girl than wot she is.

DICK. Oh, 'old yer tongue, you old devil! I've 'ad my gruel.

MRS. PAR. Come, come. Be a man.

DICK. Mrs. Pargetter. I mean, I'm—Mrs. Pargetter—

MRS. PAR. Yes? Wot?

DICK. I dunno—I dunno wot to think.

MRS. PAR. Your dad'll know wot to think.

DICK. I dunno! If I 'ad a little of my own!

MRS. PAR. Oh, if yer like to starve, starve. Walk. Pad yer 'oof.

DICK. Ah! A tramper! My 'eavenly King!

MRS. PAR. Lots on 'em pass 'ere. Dirt on 'em. Feet comin' through their boots. You see 'em nick crusts out of the gutter. Berries

of a 'edge, some on 'em. Froze stiff, some on 'em, under a rick. Lots on 'em.

DICK. Ah! Don't! I can't! [*A pause.*]

MRS. PAR. Well, Dick? Wot's it to be? Is it Jenny?

DICK. O damn it, yes, it's Jenny, Jenny. Like 'avin' a cold poultice! Very well, it's Jenny then. Now I 'ope yer satisfied.

MRS. PAR. [*Kissing him.*] There. *I* knew yer wouldn't act dishonourable. I knowed you better.

[*The door opens, the men come in, singing and laughing.* ARTIE PEARCE *crows like a cock. The* GIRLS *come down, hearing the noise.*] Wot a time you people 'ave been.

MR. PAR. Wot 'a you been doin' all the time?

ARTIE. [*Singing.*]

Making love in the evenin'
Making love in the evenin'

A drop of zider sets one up like [*wiping his mouth.*]

MRS. PAR. [*To* PARGETTER.] You'll 'ear later. All in good time. 'Ere Jenny, 'elp me with these chairs! I've watched it all right. Dick and you I mean. It's settled.

JENNY. [*With a chair.*] Give I that one, Mother. O Mother, wot fun us shall 'ave.

MR. PAR. Now us be goin' to 'ave a dance.

A GIRL. Be you a-goin' to dance, Mr. Pargetter?

MR. PAR. Course I be. Come, gaffer. Out with that fiddle o' yourn.

A GIRL. I do love a fiddle.

JENNY. A barrel hargin be good, too.

MR. PAR. Now, gaffer. Now, no long faces, anybody. Us be goin' to 'ave great times, ben't us?

NAN. Wait till I set thy chair right, gaffer.

GAFFER. [*Querulously.*] On the roads, I

seen you. Surely. And it was all—all a-blowing?

NAN. Sit 'ere, now. And 'ave this cushion.

ARTIE. Don't let granfer fall into the fire. 'E will, if you don't watch it.

GAFFER. [*Bowing in the old style.*] Beauty makes women be proud. There be few beauties 'as the 'umbleness to 'elp a old man. Ah, there be no pleasure for the old but to 'muse the young. I be a old man. A old, old man!

NAN. The old be wise, gaffer. The old 'ave peace, after their walking the world.

MRS. PAR. Stuff! [*A giggle.*]

GAFFER. There be no peace to 'im as sees you, goin' by in beauty, puttin' fire to 'em.

GIRLS. Us be waitin'. Us be all ready!

MR. PAR. Take your—

GAFFER. [*To* NAN.] What tune will the bride 'ave? A ring of bells and the maids flinging flowers at 'er. Like me and my girl 'ad.

[*Pause.*] I 'ad a flower of 'er to go to church with. [*Pause.*] They put my flower under the mould after. [*Pause.*] I 'eard the mould go knock! [*He tunes his fiddle as he speaks.*] No one remembers my white flower. [*Pause.*] That's sixty year ago.

NAN. You'll meet her again, gaffer. Per'aps she's by you now.

GAFFER. [*With a lifting voice—half rising.*] So you've a come, my 'andsome—

MRS. PAR. 'Ere. [*She taps* GAFFER'S *hand.*] Play! 'Ere! Fiddle. [*To* NAN.] Don't you see you're upsettin' 'im. Move away. One'd think you'd no feelings.

MR. PAR. Take your partners.

MRS. PAR. Now, 'ave you all got your partners?

ALL. No. Don't be so silly, Artie. Now, do be quiet. 'Ow are us to dance! [*Etc., etc.*] You come over 'ere, by me.

[NAN *stands a little apart, looking at* DICK, *waiting on him.*]

MRS. PAR. Now, now, we're all 'ere. 'Ush a moment. Afore we begin there's a little bit o' noos just 'appened, as I'd like to say about.

ARTIE. 'Ear! 'Ear!

MR. PAR. [*To* ARTIE.] You be quiet! [*He grins at* ARTIE *approvingly.*]

MRS. PAR. As I'm sure 'll come as a great surprise. Really, it quite took my breath away! It did, really. Now, I mustn't stop you young people dancing. But I must just tell you this little bit of noos. He, he! Why—

ARTIE. We ain't lookin'.

A GIRL. Be quiet, Artie.

MRS. PAR. Jenny and Dick 'ere 'ave made a match of it. I 'ope the present company'll wish the 'appy couple joy! Dick! Jenny! Give me your 'ands. There. [*She clasps them.*] I 'ope you'll be very 'appy together.

Dick [*kissing him*] you're my son now, ain't yer?

ARTIE. Spare 'is blushes, Mother.

ALL. Why, who'd ever a-thought it! I do 'ope you'll be 'appy. 'Ow sudden! Quite took my breath away! Jenny, come 'ere, and let I kiss 'ee. I s'pose us can't kiss you, Mr. Dick? No, Mr. Dick'll be quite the married man. 'E looks it already.

NAN. Dick, Dick, oh, Dick! What, oh, Dick, you weren't playing, Dick?

DICK. Don't Dick me. Get out!

MRS. PAR. Wot are yer bothering Dick for?

NAN. I thought 'e'd something—something to say to me.

DICK. You thought I was a oly scrawf, didn't yer?

NAN. I thought I was a 'appy woman, Dick. [*She looks at him and goes slowly over to a chair. As she goes.*]

MR. PAR. Now, Nan. What are you waitin' for? Take your place 'ere and dance, now.

MRS. PAR. Per'aps Nan is like 'er father.

JENNY. [*Sliding her feet about.*] 'Ow's that, Mother?

MRS. PAR. Per'aps she can only dance on air.

NAN. [*Going to her.*] Yes, yes, I am like my father. You coward to say that.

MR. PAR. Wot are you thinking of, with company present?

MRS. PAR. You leave her to me. I'll deal with her. [*To the company.*] She thought if she 'ad 'er 'air down an' 'er neck un'ooked as *she* might 'ave a go in at Dick, 'ere.

TOMMY. 'Ope us didn't come too soon, Dick.

JENNY. She believes in giving all for love, Cousin Nan do.

MRS. PAR. She'll give no more in this house.

Why, 'er dad was 'ung for a thief only last Christmas.

MR. PAR. Now, Mother, that's—No, she deserves it. She ain't been straight.

ALL. Ah.

NAN. Yes. I'd like you all to know that. My dad was 'ung at Glorster. I'd oughtn't to a shook your 'ands without I'd told you. I tried 'ard to tell you, Dick. Dick. Dick. I give you all I had. You 'ad me. Like I never was. Not to any. O Dick, I 'ope you'll be very, very 'appy.

DICK. 'Ere. Go and say your piece to Gaffer there. 'E 'asn't many pleasures, I've done with yer. 'Ere, Jenny, you be goin' to dance with I.

JENNY. [*Giggling.*] I think I could 'elp, Dick Gurvil.

DICK. 'Elp me then. Come on.

JENNY. Law. It make my heart all of a

flower. That's wot Cousin Nan says. I s'pose it must be very clever if 'er says it.

NAN. I wish—I wish the grass was over my 'ed.

DICK. 'Ere. Us wish to dance.

[NAN *goes aside.*]

GAFFER. A bride's tears be zoon a-dried. But love be a zweet vlower. A girt red vlower. Her do last for ever. For ever. [*He plays "Joan to the Maypole."*] Like me and my girl, for ever!

[*They dance.*]

CURTAIN

ACT III

Scene:—The Same. NAN *at table at back. A noise within.* GAFFER *in his chair.*

NAN. Life be that bitter. O dad, life be that bitter.

GAFFER. You be young to 'ave life bitter on you.

NAN. It isn't time makes us old.

GAFFER. Some on us is glad to go away. Quite early.

NAN. I wish I could go away. I wish I could go away.

GAFFER. Us'll be took away, afore long.

NAN. I'd like to be took away now.

GAFFER. I've a-wanted to be took away ever since my vlower were took. Many a long

year. And I grawed to be a old, old man. I were out of work sometimes. And I be old now. Very old.

NAN. Per'aps you'll join 'er soon, gaffer.

GAFFER. Noa. Not for a girt while. I 'ave 'er little grave. I 'ave 'er little grave to see to. With vlowers and that. If I 'ad girt bags of gold like Squire, I could 'ave a 'edstone put. I'd 'ave 'er little grave all carved. I'd 'ave posies cut. And 'er face down on the stone. All in white I'd 'ave my vlower cut. White stone. There be no kings 'd 've whiter. But I can't never avord a 'edstone. So I ben't goin' to die. Noa. I ben't goin' to die.

NAN. When love be dead, gaffer, what be there else?

GAFFER. There be the grave. It be all the poor 'as, just the grave. And I got my vlower's grave. Eight maids in white there was. No older than my vlower they was. And there

were all white vlowers on 'er. Eight maids in white, maidy. And the bell tolling. Oh, my white blossom to go under the grass.

NAN. She was very young to be took, Gaffer.

GAFFER. They was eight maids in white when they carried 'er. Then they was women. Beautiful they were. Then they grew old. One by one. And then their 'ouses were to let, with the windows broke. And grass and grass. They be all gone. When I be gone there'll be none to tell the beauty of my vlower. There'll be none as knows where 'er body lies. I 'ave 'er little grave all done with shells. And the vlowers that do come up, they be little words from 'er. Little zhining words. Fifty-nine year them little words come.

NAN. I got a grave, too, gaffer. And I 'ave fifty-nine years to come.

GAFFER. My bright 'ansome. Oo 'ave you in yer grave?

NAN. I 'ave my 'eart in the grave, gaffer. But there'll be no vlowers come up out of 'er. I shall be 'ere fifty-nine year per'aps. Like you been. Fifty-nine year. Twelve times fifty-nine is—and four times that. Three hundred and sixty-five days in a year. Up, and work, and lie down again. But dead, dead, dead. All the time dead. No. No. Not that. Gaffer. How did thy vlower die?

GAFFER. There come a gold rider in the evening, maidy.

NAN. You was by 'er, Gaffer?

GAFFER. She look out of the window, my white vlower done. She said, "The tide. The tide. The tide coming up the river." And a horn blew. The gold rider blew a 'orn. And she rose up, my white vlower done. And she burst out a-laughing, a-laughing. And 'er fell

back, my white vlower done. Gold 'air on the pillow. And blood. Oh, blood. Blood of my girl. Blood of my vlower.

NAN. In your arms, gaffer?

GAFFER. On my 'eart. My white vlower lay on my 'eart. The tide. The tide. The tide coming up the river.

NAN. She was 'appy to die so, gaffer. Along of 'er true love. You 'ad the sweet of love along of your vlower. But them as 'as the sharp of love. Them as never 'as no sweet. O I wish the tide was comin' up over my 'ed, I do.

GAFFER. It be full moon to-night, maidy.

NAN. Full moon. It come up misty. And red.

GAFFER. It was red on the pillow. Then.

NAN. The harvest-moon.

GAFFER. There'll be a high tide to-night.

NAN. A high tide.

GAFFER. For some on us.

NAN. Why for some on us, gaffer?

GAFFER. The tide be comin' for some on us.

NAN. For you, gaffer?

GAFFER. Ther've come no message yet for me. But the tide be a-comin' for some on us. It 'ave someone every time. It 'ad my vlower one time. O it be a gallows thing, the tide. First there be the mud and that. Sand banks. Mud banks. And the 'erons fishing. Sand in the river, afore the tide comes. Mud. The cows come out o' pasture to drink. They come on the sand. Red cows. But they be afraid of the tide.

NAN. They 'aven't no grief, the beasts asn't. Cropping in the meadows when the sun do zhine.

GAFFER. They be afraid of the tide. For first there come a-wammerin' and a-wammerin'. Miles away that wammerin' be. In the

sea. The shipmen do cross theirselves. And it come up. It come nearer. Wammerin'! Wammerin'! 'Ush it says. 'Ush it says. 'Ush it says. And there come a girt wash of it over the rock. White. White. Like a bird. Like a swan a-gettin' up out of the pool.

NAN. Bright it goes. High. High up. Flashing.

GAFFER. And it wammers and it bubbles. And then it spreads. It goes out like soldiers. It go out into a line. It curls. It curls. It go toppling and toppling. And on it come. And on it come.

NAN. Fast. Fast.

A black line. And the foam all creamin' on it.

GAFFER. It be a snake. A snake. A girt water snake with its 'ed up. Swimming. On it come.

NAN. A bright crown upon it. And hungry.

GAFFER. With a rush. With a roar. And its claws clutchin' at you. Out they go at the sides, the claws do.

NAN. The claws of the tide.

GAFFER. Singing. Singing. And the sea a-roaring after. O, it takes them. They stand out in the river. And it goes over them. Over them. Over them. One roarin' rush.

NAN. Deep. Deep. Water in their eyes. Over their hair. And to-night it be the harvest tide.

GAFFER. [*As though waking from a dream.*] The salmon-fishers 'll lose their nets to-night. The tide'll sweep them away. O, I've known it. It takes the nets up miles. Miles. They find 'em high up. Beyond Glorster. Beyond 'Artpury. Girt golden flag-flowers over 'em. And apple-trees a-growin' over 'em. Apples of red and apples of gold. They fall into the water. The water be still

there, where the apples fall. The nets 'ave apples in them.

NAN. And fish, gaffer?

GAFFER. Strange fish. Strange fish out of the sea.

NAN. Yes. Strange fish indeed, gaffer. A strange fish in the nets to-morrow. A dumb thing. Knocking agen the bridges. Something white. Something white in the water. They'd pull me out. Men would. They'd touch my body. [*Shuddering.*] I couldn't. I couldn't.

[*Loud laughter from within, and a clatter of knives. The door opens. Enter* JENNY *from inner room, carrying a dirty plate, with dirty knife and fork. As* JENNY *comes in,* MRS. PARGETTER *is heard off.*]

MRS. PAR. Is *she* in there?

JENNY. Yes.

MRS. P. Tell 'er to come in.

JENNY. [*To* NAN.] You're to go in, mother says.

PAR. [*Heard off.*] 'Ere, shut that door behind yer. It blows my 'ed off. [JENNY *turns and shuts the door.*]

NAN. What 'ave you got there, Jenny?

JENNY. [*Uneasily.*) You're to go in, mother says.

NAN. [*Rising.*] Never mind what mother says. Answer my question, my friend, my girt friend, my little creeping friend. What 'ave you got there?

JENNY. [*Shrinking.*] A mutton parsty pie for gaffer, as mother sent. It'll be a little treat for 'im.

NAN. [*Looking.*] Whose plate have you brought it on, my little friend?

JENNY. [*Stammering.*] Mother's plate.

NAN. It is a dirty plate. And the knives and forks are dirty.

JENNY. [*Confidently.*] Gaffer won't know any different. It's good enough for an old man like 'im. 'Ere, gaffer. 'Ere's some supper for yer.

NAN. [*Going up to her.*] No, my friend, my girt friend, my little Judas friend, my little pale snake friend. It's not good enough. Did *you* 'ave one of them pies?

JENNY. [*Blustering.*] You can—I ain't goin' to—

NAN. Did you? The sheep died. The sheep died last week. Did *you* eat one of them pies?

JENNY. No, I know what the sheep die of. Gaffer won't mind. 'Ere, gaffer.

NAN. [*Fiercely.*] Sit down, my little friend. Sit down and eat that pie yourself. Eat it. Eat it or I'll kill you. Eat it. You with no charity to old or young. You shall eat

the charity of the uncharitable. Eat it. You little snake. Eat it.

JENNY. I'll—I'll send mother to you.

NAN. [*Preventing her.*] No. Oh, no. [*Forcing her into a chair.*] Eat. Eat. (JENNY *in great terror begins to eat.*]

JENNY. I be goin' to be sick.

NAN. Eat. (JENNY *eats. Then shrinks back.*]

JENNY. [*After a mouthful.*] Wot are you lookin' at me for?

NAN. I'm looking at my friend. My friend.

JENNY. [*After a mouthful.*] I can't eat with you watchin' me.

NAN. Yes, Jenny. It is your bride cake. Your bride cake. Your bride cake for your marriage, Jenny.

JENNY. [*Screaming.*] *Don't* look at me like that.

NAN. [*Coming up to her and glaring down*

into her face.] Yes, Jenny. I must look at you like this. I must look into your soul, Jenny. Into your soul. [*Slowly and quietly.*]

JENNY. Ah-h.

NAN. You 'ave pale eyes, Jenny. Pale eyes. I can look into your soul. D'you know what I see, Jenny? [*A pause.*] I see your soul. It is cold, Jenny. It's a little mean cold, lying thing. You're a lucky one, Jenny. You cannot love nor hate. A dog loves more and hates more. A worm do. D'you know what comes to such souls, Jenny?

JENNY. [*Gasping.*] Mother! Mother!

NAN. I'll tell you, Jenny. I'll tell your future to you. I see your life very plain in your pale eyes. I see a girt town, with lamps. And I see you in a public 'ouse, Jenny, with red on your white cheeks. And your pale eyes are swollen with drink. And you've a raggy skirt. And you cough. And you tremble. That is the

pay in this world, Jenny, for a little cold mean lying thing. And I see a dirty room with a dirty bed, and you lying dead on it. Your painted cheeks on the pillow. Till the town dead-cart come. Out with you. Out with you. Out with you. [JENNY *totters, gasping, to the door.*]

JENNY. Ah. Ah-h! [*She leans up against the door, holding it by the latch, in terror; she is only half conscious.*]

GAFFER. [*Rousing and shading his eyes, looking up.*] Be you ready for your journey, maidy?

NAN. My journey.

GAFFER. You must eat and drink, my 'andsome. 'E be coming.

NAN. Who be coming?

GAFFER. The gold rider, maidy. 'E be comin' on the road.

NAN. The gold rider. We will eat and

drink, gaffer. It be a long road to go. [*She opens oven and brings out the apple-pasty; then takes a carving knife, and plate. Then the brandy bottle. She cuts the pasty and gives food to* GAFFER.]

GAFFER. [*Rising unsteadily and holding up his hands.*] Bless this food to thy service. Bless the Giver of all good things. Amen. [*He eats.*]

NAN. Amen. [*The outer door is knocked. Footsteps outside.*] Drink, gaffer. [*She gives him a sup of brandy.*]

GAFFER. [*Drinking to her.*] A fair journey. Vlowers on the road afore you. O gold 'oofs. Gold 'oofs. Be swift. Swift. [*A knocking at outer door.*]

A VOICE. Is anyone inside there? Open.

NAN. Drink, gaffer. [*Violent knocking outside. The inner door is shaken by those within.*

JENNY *holds the latch and keeps them from entering.*]

JENNY. O! O! Don't let 'er in on me. Don't let 'er in on me. [*Falling against the wall.*] Oh, oh.

[*Enter the* PARGETTERS *and* DICK. *The others cluster at the doorway.*]

DICK. [*Seeing* JENNY *and glad to have* NAN *for once in the wrong. Angrily.*] Wot 'ave you been doin' to 'er? Eh?

MRS. PAR. [*Advancing on* NAN.] Why can't you open the door? Standing staring there.

PAR. Wot 'ave she done to you, Jenny?

MRS. PAR. [*Turning.*] Never you 'eed wot she's done to 'er. You go and open the door. 'Ere, Jenny. Go on inside. Go on now. Before they see yer.

DICK. She's—she's—Best 'ave 'er locked up, mother.

MRS. PAR. Open the door, there.

[JENNY *totters out.*]

MR. PAR. Wot's brought 'er into that state?

NAN. She has seen herself, uncle. There's few can bear that sight. A worm in the dust fears it.

MRS. P. You don't mean to say as you've cut the parsty.

PAR. 'Ush. They'll 'ear yer.

MRS. P. [*In a blood-curdling voice.*] And look at your uncle's bottle. If I don't give it yer for this. [*A knock.*]

A VOICE WITHOUT. Come on. Come on. I've got no time to waste.

MRS. P. [*Going to the door with her best society smile.*] I didn't 'ear yer knock. Wot with comp'ny. I 'ope I 'aven't kep you waitin', I'm sure. [*Peering at visitors.*] Good evenin', sir. Will, fetch chairs for the gentlemen. Why,

it's Mr. Drew. Come in, sir. Won't you please ter come in, sir.

DREW. Thank you.

[*Enter* PARSON DREW, CAPTAIN DIXON *and a* CONSTABLE *carrying a handbag.*]

PAR. [*Fetching chairs.*] Good evenin', sir.

DREW. Good evenin', Pargetter.

PAR. [*To* DIXON.] Good evenin', sir.

DIXON. [*Coldly to* CONSTABLE.] Put that bag on the table.

DREW. Well, Dick. Is that you, Ellen? You grow so fast. Nan. Yes. Yes. Good evening, everybody.

PAR. [*In a stage whisper to* MRS. PARGETTER.] 'Ave the table cleared.

DIXON. [*Irritably.*] Never mind the table.

MRS. PAR. You must excuse things bein' a bit untidy, sir. Wot with 'avin' company, we're all topsy turvy, as you mid say. [*Suavely to*

NAN.] Jest take that parsty off the table, Nan, there's a good girl.

NAN. I've done with make-believes, Aunt. One makes believe too long.

MRS. P. [*To* DREW.] She loves a bit of play-actin', sir. She do it wonderful, considerin'.

DIXON. Oh, Drew. Drew. [*Irritably.*]

MRS. P. She's been givin' us a bit out of Shakespeare as they call it.

DREW. Yes. Yes. Yes. Now hush, please, a moment everybody. [EVERYBODY *is silent.*] [*Raising a hand.*] I'm afraid we come at a very inconvenient time. But—[*Seeing those in the door.*] Oh, just come in there, will you? Yes. Yes. It's a very pleasant duty. It's not often that I have such a pleasure as I have tonight. [*Taking chair.*] Yes. Thank you. Sit down, Mr. Dixon.

DIXON. [*Coldly.*] *Captain* Dixon.

DREW. Yes, yes, to be sure. Captain Dixon, to be sure. I beg your pardon, Captain Dixon. I'm sure you'll all be very glad when you hear what it is that makes us interrupt your evening's pleasure.

DIXON. [*Tartly.*] Excuse me, Mr. Drew. But hadn't we better come to business?

DREW. Yes, yes, but—

DIXON. [*Mildly.*] I shall miss the coach back to town.

DREW. O, no, no, no, no. O, no, no, no. Oh, you've ten minutes yet. More. You've got lots of time. You'll hear the horn long before the coach is due.

MRS. P. Yes, sir. You'll 'ear the horn a long ways off. If it's the coach you want.

GAFFER. The horn. The horn. Gold hoofs beating on the road. [*He advances to the table.*] They beat like the ticking of a 'eart. Soon. Very soon. The golden trump.

MRS. P. [*Angrily.*] Could ever anything! [*Quietly.*] You old stupe. Take 'im out, Will. Don't let 'im begin in 'ere. [*To Dixon.*] Don't mind 'im, sir. 'E's silly.

[GAFFER *goes to the door and looks out into the moonlight.*]

GAFFER. [*At the door.*] Maybe I'll meet 'im on the road.

[*He goes out.*]

DREW. One of our—You know, eh. [*Taps his forehead.*]

DIXON. [*Sourly.*] I thought it was another bit out of Shakespeare as they call it.

PAR. Yes, sir. 'E talks very strange sometimes.

DREW. Yes, yes, poor fellow.

DIXON. I suppose this is the right house?

DREW. Yes, of course. Yes, certainly, certainly.

DIXON. [*Taking bag and unlocking it.*] I

thought it might be the—the—Yes. Ye-es. Very well, then. [*Suddenly.*] Which of you is Nan Hardwick?

NAN. I am that one.

DIXON. Ye-es. You. Very well then. Is that correct, Mr. Drew?

DREW. Certainly. Certainly.

DIXON. Daughter of Mary Hardwick, and of—of Edward Hardwick who was—eh?

NAN. Who was hanged at Gloucester.

DIXON. Of Swanscombe, in the Hundred of —Yes. Very well then. [*Turning to others.*] You certify that this is that Nan Hardwick?

THE OTHERS. Yes, sir. That be 'er.

DIXON. Very well, then. That's not the horn, Drew?

DREW. O, no, no.

DIXON. [*Taking bag and papers out of handbag.*] Have you a pen and ink in the house?

PAR. [*Taking them from the dresser.*] This is a pen and ink, sir.

DIXON. Ye-es. [*Writes.*] This pen's—Drew, have you got a pen? [*To* MRS. PAR.] Give me a penwiper. [*He wipes, and then mends pen with a penknife.*] Ye-es, Ye-es. [*Sharply.*] Nan Hardwick, your father was—er—put to death for stealing a sheep near Aston Magna. No. Don't answer. That is the fact. Ye-es. Very well then. The sheep was the property of Mr. Nicols. Now it has been proved that your father, Edward Hardwick, had nothing to do with that sheep.

NAN. And you come here, do you, to tell me that? You have a thousand men beneath you, a thousand strong men like the man there. And you have judges in scarlet, and lawyers in wigs. And a little child out of the road could have told you that my dad was innocent. A

little child of the road. By once looking in his eyes.

DIXON. I can't go into all that. You must keep to the point. [DREW *whispers.*] What? Yes. Yes. I daresay.

DREW. [*To* NAN.] Let Captain Dixon finish what he's got to say.

MRS. P. Where's yer manners gorn? You wait till afterwards.

DIXON. To continue. The sheep was stolen by Mr. Nicol's shepherd, who was the chief witness against your father.

NAN. The sheep was stolen by Richard Shapland.

DIXON. [*Staring at her.*] Who has since confessed.

ALL. Ah. Confessed. Think of that. There now.

DIXON. A sad miscarriage of justice. Very well then. While we support the laws, we must

be content to suffer from their occasional misapplication. [*Glances at his watch.*]

DREW. Lots of time. Lots of time.

DIXON. Ye-es. But in this instance, the Home Office has decided to offer you some compensation.

NAN. Some blood-money. Thirty pieces of silver.

DIXON. No. It's more. It's fifty pounds. [*He empties bag.*] Will you count it over please, before signing the receipt?

NAN. No. No. The blood and tears are sticky on it.

DREW. She's upset. I'll count it.

PAR. [*Pouring brandy for* NAN.] 'Ere, Nan. 'Ave just a drop.

[*She refuses.*]

OTHERS. Fifty pou-und. Fifty pou-und. Did you ever.

DICK. [*Muttering.*] A 'orse and trap. And furnish a 'ouse.

DREW. Fifty. Would you like to count it over, Pargetter?

PAR. No, thanky, sir, I'm sure.

DIXON. [*To* NAN.] Are you satisfied? [*Sharply.*] Nan Hardwick.

NAN. What d'you want more?

DIXON. Are you satisfied that the sum is correct?

NAN. Oh. The money. You know it is. Why go to all this trouble? Give me your pen. There. There's my name to your paper. Received. By me. Fifty pounds in gold.

DIXON. And the date. Ye-es. I'll just add the date. [*To the* CONSTABLE.] Witness it, Horton. [*The man signs. He looks at his watch again.*] I shall miss that coach.

DREW. Won't you think better of it, and

stay the night? Stay, man, stay and see the tide. It's a wonderful sight.

DIXON. No, thanks. No, thanks. [*He gathers up his handbag.*] Here you are, Horton. [*Gives him bag.*] I hope the money may be a comfort to you. [*To* NAN.] Where can I catch this coach?

MRS. P. Just down the lane, sir. It is but a step. Keep on right down, sir. You can't miss it, sir.

PAR. You'll 'ear the 'arn go, sir.

DIXON AND HORTON. Good night. [*Going.*]

ALL. Good night, sir. Good night, Officer.

DICK. [*To* PARGETTER.] Wouldn't 'e take a drop of somethin'?

PAR. Noa. It's not for the likes of us to offer.

DICK. You can't ever tell.

DREW. I'm sure that what we have just heard has given us all a great deal of pleasure.

I won't dwell on the satisfaction to yourself, Nan, for fear of giving you pain. But I am sure that your good aunt, who has been so kind to you—

MRS. P. No more than my sacred dooty, Mr. Drew.

DREW. [*Gallantly.*] I will spare your blushes, Mrs. Pargetter. And all your young friends who are here to-night. I'm sure that they all feel with me—

[*Re-enter* DIXON.]

DIXON. Excuse me, Drew. Do show me the way to where the coach passes. These beastly lanes are—

DREW. Yes. Yes. Certainly. Certainly. [*To the Company.*] I must wish you all good night. So sorry to have interrupted your evening's amusement.

MRS. P. A pleasure I'm sure, sir.

DREW. [*To* NAN.] By the way, Nan. Per-

haps I should say Miss Hardwick, now you're an heiress. Mrs. Drew would like to see you at the Rectory to-morrow—She thinks you might like to live with us as our housekeeper.

DIXON. Come on. Come on.

DREW. Coming, Captain Dixon. But we'll go into that to-morrow. Shall we?

NAN. Thank you, sir. I hope you'll thank Mrs. Drew, too, sir. But I shall not come to the Rectory to-morrow. Unless—unless the fishers bring their take to you. For you to choose your tithe.

DREW. [*Puzzled.*] Well. Ah. Ah yes. Well, think it over. Sleep on it.

NAN. I shall sleep soundly on it.

DREW. Good night, everybody. Now, Captain Dixon.

[*Exit.*]

[*Returning.*] Mrs. Pargetter!

MRS. P. Yes, sir. [*He draws her aside and whispers, pointing to* NAN.]

DREW. [*In stage whisper.*] To bed at once.

[NAN *smiles bitterly.*]

MRS. P. Yes, sir. Pore thing, it's been too much for 'er. I don't wonder.

[*Exit* DREW.]

MRS. P. 'E's gone at last. [*To the others.*] Go on in back to supper. Us'll be with yer in a minute. Shut the door. There's sech a draught.

[*They go.*]

DICK. I'll fetch in Miss Nan a bit of supper.

MRS. P. It's a pity you don't 'eed the mote in yer own eye without 'eedin' the camel in yer neighbour's. Go in and see to Jenny.

PAR. Well, Nan, it be a long lane as 'as no turning, as they say. I knew thy pore dad when us was boys. When us goe'd a nesting after ardiestraws. Dear, dear. 'E won the prize for kiddy potatoes, and for kiddy beans.

I be glad, that I be, to 'ear—wot we've 'eard to-night.

NAN. So you are glad, are you? Glad.

MRS. P. If you 'adn't a black 'eart, you'd be glad yourself, I should a-thought. Some people a-got no feelin's.

PAR. Fifty pound be a lot of money, too.

NAN. The worth of a man's life 'ad need to be a lot of money.

PAR. There's two things you could do with all that money. You could put 'er into the Bank and that. Or you could—I'd be very glad to borrow it of you, to 'elp me on the farm. And pay you the interest, like.

NAN. And if I'd refuse. What then?

MRS. P. Refuse? Refuse? I don't doubt you give yerself airs. It's wot we'd expect of yer—

PAR. [*Interrupting.*] I'm only asking.—To keep it in the family.

MRS. P. [*To* PAR.] Asking? Givin' in to 'er wills and 'er won'ts. Wot's asking got to do with it? 'Ere. You're under age. We're yer guardians. *We'll* take care of that money for yer.

NAN. Yes. You'll want some money, for Jenny's portion.

PAR. [*Controlling his temper.*] I 'aven't said nothink yet—

MRS. P. No. You 'aven't got the sperrit of a 'og with the twitters.

PAR. [*Angrily.*] I don't want none of *yer* jaw.

MRS. P. Don't you nag at me, for I won't 'ave it. See?

NAN. The money is mine. Not yours. I have a use for it.

PAR. [*To* NAN.] Then I've done with yer. You talk rude to the quality. You give all sorts of talk to—Talk as 'd sick a savage. Do wot

y' like with yer money. But you'll make good my Toby jug, at least. Now then.

NAN. Your Toby jug?

PAR. You know wot I mean.

NAN. Aha. The little friend. My little friend. [*A cry within.*] That's 'er soul's voice that cry is. So *that* is wot—

MRS. P. And you 'ad the cold blooded cheek to 'ave your go at the parsty, wot's more.

PAR. And—there—I'll leave you to your conscience. [*Going.*]

MRS. P. Stop a moment, Will. Us'll settle 'er with 'er, onst for all.

NAN. [*Going to the money bag and cutting its tape.*] Yes. We'll settle. Look at it. Look at it. [*She pours the gold into a heap.*] Gold. Gold. Little yellow rounds of metal. Fifty little yellow rounds of metal. This. This is for a man's life. Oh, you little yellow rounds that buy things. Look at 'em. Hear 'em. [*Pause.*]

Don't you speak to me. [*Intensely.*] There was a strong man, a kind man. He was forty-nine years old. He was the best thatcher in the three counties. He was the sweetest singer. I've known teams goin' to the field stop to 'ear my dad sing. And the red coats come. And a liar swore. And that strong man was killed. Sudden. That voice of his'n was choked out with a cord. And there was liars, and thieves, and drunken women, and dirty gentlemen. They all stood in the cold to see that man choked. They stop up all night, playing cards, so as they should 'ear 'is singin' stopped. For it goes round the voice the cord do. And they draw a nightcap down so as 'e shan't see 'is girl a-crying. [*Pause.*] And for that, I get little yellow round things. [*Pause.*] And there was a girl, a young girl, a girl with a sick 'eart. D'you know what came to 'er? You know what came to 'er. She came among them as

might have made much of 'er. For she'd 'ave give a lot for a kind word. 'Er 'eart was that broke 'er'd 'ave broke out a-crying at a kind word.

MRS. P. When you've done with your fallals, I'll 'ave my say.

NAN. Don't you speak. Don't you threaten. You'll listen to me. You 'ad me in your power. And wot was good in me you sneered at. And wot was sweet in me you soured. And wot was bright in me you dulled. I was a fly in the spider's web. And the web came round me and round me, till it was a shroud, till there was no more joy in the world. Till my 'eart was bitter as that ink, and all choked. And for that I get little yellow round things. [*Pause and change of voice.*] And all of it—No need for any of it. My dad's life, and your taunts, and my broke 'eart. All a mistake. A mistake. Somethin' to be put right by fifty

pound while a gentleman waits for a coach. 'E thought nothing of it. 'E thought only of getting the coach. 'E didn't even pretend. [*A cry within.*] It were a game to 'im. 'E laughed at it. [*A cry within.*] Yes. She has seen herself. No wonder she cries. She sees the parish dead-cart coming.

[DICK *puts his head in at the door.*]

DICK. Mother. Come to Jenny. Quick.

MRS. P. To 'ell with Jenny. I've somethin' to attend to 'ere.

DICK. She's in a fit or somethink. Us can 'ardly 'old 'er down.

MRS. P. [*To* NAN.] More of yer work. You wait till I come back.

A GIRL. [*At the door.*] Quick, Mrs. Pargetter.

[MRS. PARGETTER *snatches the brandy bottle and goes out.*]

PAR. I don't know 'ow all this'll end, Nan.

[*He goes out.*]

[*Re-enter* DICK.]

DICK. I brought you a little bit o' supper, Miss Nan.

NAN. What then?

DICK. I thought—Won't you sit down and 'ave it, Miss Nan? There. Let me put this chair comferable.

NAN. Why do you bring this to me?

DICK. I thought — some'ow — I thought you'd like a bit of cossitin'.

NAN. I want nothin'. Nothin'.

DICK. Miss Nan. I want just to say. Some-'ow, it be 'ard to explain. But I ask—I ask your forgiveness. 'Umbly I ask it. Oh, Miss Nan. My beau-ti-vul. My beautivul as I wronged.

NAN. As you wronged. Yes?

DICK. I was—I dunno—I was led away, Miss Nan.

NAN. Yes, Dick. You were led away. How were you led away? Why?

DICK. I was that. When I 'eard as your dad was. I mean when I 'eard of your dad. I doan' know. It seemed—I felt some'ow. I be that dry I can't 'ardly speak. Miss Nan—

NAN. You felt some'ow? Yes?

DICK. As your 'air was, was a cord round my throat. Choking. I was sick. I couldn't—no—I couldn't.

NAN. And was that the only reason why?

DICK. Yes, Miss Nan.

NAN. And why did you choose Jenny? My kiss was still warm upon your lips. [*Going to him.*] Your blood was singing in your veins with me, when you turned—Why did you turn to 'er?

[*A pause.*]

She was not a—a gallus-bird. Eh?

[*A pause.* DICK *licks his lips and swallows.*]

[*Re-enter* GAFFER *slowly, with a few roses plucked in the garden. He goes to* NAN.]

GAFFER. The moon be at full, O wonder. The cows in the meadows kneel down.

The rabbits be kneelin'. The vlowers in the edge do kneel—

Roses for your 'air, my beauty. O my bright 'ansome of the world.

[*He gives the roses reverently.*]

Roses in your 'air. And the bride's 'air loose.

[NAN *places a rose in her hair and loosens it about her.*]

NAN. [*Taking some money.*] For a 'ead-stone, Gaffer. [*Sharply.*] Well, Dick.

DICK. I was.—O, I can't. To show that I 'ad done with yer. I was angry.

NAN. Because I didn't tell you of my dad?

DICK. Yes.

NAN. There be three times, Dick, when no woman can speak. Beautiful times. When 'er

'ears 'er lover, and when 'er gives 'erself, and when 'er little one is born. You—You'd have been the first to stop me if I'd spoken then.

DICK. I thought as you'd—not been straight —I thought—

NAN. And now you turn again from Jenny. Why have you left Jenny, Dick?

GAFFER. [*Jangling and counting money.*]

"Nine. 'Ow the bells do chime,

Ten. There's a path for men."

DICK. Because I don't care for 'er. Because now—

GAFFER. 'Leven. From the earth to 'eaven.

DICK. Be quiet, Gaffer.

NAN. Because?

DICK. O, Miss Nan. It be you as I love. My dad 'ave stop me afore. But now your name be cleared—

NAN. Is that the only reason?

GAFFER. [*Talking through.*]

Twelve. Twelve. Us rang out a peal at twelve. Angels. Gold angels. The devil walks the dark at twelve. Ghosts. Ghosts. Behind the white 'edstones. Smite 'em, gold rider. Smite 'em with thy bright sharp spear.

NAN. Is that the only reason? You love me, then?

DICK. Yes. That's the only reason. I love you, Nan.

NAN. And what will my aunt say?

DICK. Damn 'er. It's 'er that came between us.

NAN. I know what you can say to 'er.

DICK. What?

NAN. Go to her now. Take her that bag of money. Tell her she may have that. But that you will marry me, not Jenny.

[DICK, *rather staggered, takes up the bag and walks slowly to door.*]

DICK. Wouldn't it be better, Miss Nan, if us—if us just told 'er, without—without bein'—

NAN. I knew it. I knew it.

[*A horn is heard faintly off.*]

GAFFER. There be a music on the sea, a soft music. The ships be troubled at the music.

NAN. Come here, Dick. They said my dad kill a sheep. A foundered old ewe as'd feel nothin'; 'ardly the knife on 'er throat. And my dad was 'ung; only acos they said 'e kill a beast like that. They choked 'im dead, in front of 'alf a city. But you come. And you 'ave yer love of a girl. You says lovely things to 'er. Things as'd move any girl—and only because you be greedy. Greedy of a mouth agen your mouth; of a girl's lips babblin' love at you. And a sour old woman's word'll make you 'it that girl across the lips you kissed. In ten minutes. You'll take 'er lovin' 'eart and 'er girl's pride, and all 'er joy in the world, and stamp it in the

dust. And you'll dance on 'er white body; and all you'll feel is the blood makin' a mess on your boots.

[*The horn blows nearer.*]

GAFFER. The horn. The horn. O night owl laughing in the wood.

NAN. And you go to another girl. And you give 'er a joy in the world. And then you see your old love not wot the old woman said. No. But as sweet to the taste, as dear to your greedy mouth. And with gold—yellow round things—to buy vanity. 'Ouses, 'orses, position. Then you come back whining. Whining! For 'er to take you back. So as you mid 'ave that gold.

DICK. O, you can talk. You've a right. But I love you, Nan. I do love yer.

NAN. I see very plain to-night, Dick. I see right, right into you. Right down. You talk o' thieves. You talk o' them as kills—them as leads women wrong. Sinners you calls them.

But it be you is the sinner. You kill people's 'earts. You stamp them in the dust, like worms as you tread on in the fields. And under it all will be the women crying, the broken women, the women cast aside. Tramped on. Spat on. As you spat on me. No, no, oh no. Oh young man in your beauty—Young man in your strong hunger. I will spare those women.

DICK. [*Scared, and speaking loudly, so as to attract them in the inner room.*] I never! Mother! Mother!

GAFFER. O Love you be a King. A King.

NAN. I will spare those women. Come here to me.

DICK. Ah! Ah! Mother! [*He backs towards the door.*]

GAFFER. On the road. They come. Gold hoofs. Gold hoofs.

NAN. Spare them. Spare them. Spare them the hell. The hell of the heart-broken.

Die—you—die. [*She stabs him with the pastry knife. He falls.*]

DICK. [*Raising himself stupidly.*] The drums be a-roaring. A-roaring. [*He dies.*]

GAFFER. [*Clapping his hands.*] Oh Beauty, beauty. Oh beauty of my white vlower.

[*A murmuring and rushing noise is heard as the tide sweeps up from the sea.*]

GAFFER. [*Shouts.*] It be coming. Out of the wells of the sea. The eagles of the sea hear it. They sharp their beaks.

[*Enter hurriedly the others.*]

MRS. P. [*Running to* DICK.] Dick. Dick. Oh! [*Screams.*] Look at it all smoking.

PAR. 'Ere. The brandy. Quick. 'E's gone.

NAN. [*As the noise increases.*] The tide.

GAFFER. The tide.

NAN. [*Laughing.*] The tide coming up the river.

MRS. P. Take the money, Will. Don't 'eed the brandy.

A GIRL. The pleece, Artie. Get the pleece.

NAN. [*Going to the door as the noise increases.*] A strange fish in the nets to-morrow.

[*She goes.*]

GAFFER. Singing. Singing. Roaring it come. Roaring it come. Over the breast. Over the lips. Over the eyes.

[*The horn blows.*]

MRS. P. [*Putting the money hastily in the locker.*] That's something. Wot are we to tell them?

[*The coach-horn blows loudly and clearly.*]

GAFFER. The horn! The horn!

CURTAIN

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